

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION

AMAZING STORIES

DECEMBER, 1955 VOL. 29 NO. 7

WORLD'S LEADING SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINE

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PROFESSOR MAINBOCHER'S PLANET

By Ivar Jorgensen

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AMAZING STORIES, Vol. 29, No. 7, December 1955, is published bi-monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1953), at 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at Post Office at Chicago, Ill. Subscription rates: U. S. and possessions and Canada \$4.00 for 12 issues; Pan American Union Countries \$4.50; all other foreign countries \$5.00.

AMAZING

STORIES

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

DECEMBER 1955

Volume 29 Number 7

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
William B. Ziff (1898-1953) Founder
Editorial and Executive Offices
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

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the observatory

by The Editor



• As just about everybody who reads science fiction knows by now, *Amazing Stories* returns to a monthly schedule with the January, 1956, issue.

In a day of declining sales and suspended titles, any announcement of a reversal in the trend is news indeed. Reactions from readers, writers and fellow editors ran from "Are you guys *nuts*?" to "Are you guys *crazy*?"

The state of our mental health had nothing to do with it. The move to monthly publication was not made on the spur of the moment nor as the result of a casual impulse. Distressed by the shaky state of the science-fiction field, we set out early in 1955 to attempt to learn the real reason for its decline, and the cure, if any.

From the first, a lot of false theories popped up to confuse us: "Everybody's watching TV." "People no longer get a bang out of science fiction since science caught up with it." "Writers in the field aren't writers at all; just ex-fans who can't get honest jobs." "People prefer reading fact articles instead of fiction." "Movies are better than ever."

Slowly, what we believed was the real answer began to make itself visible. Very simply, it seemed that science fiction was no longer *fun to read*. The ingredients which made for reading pleasure in the genre were missing. Take the pleasure out of what is supposed to give pleasure and there is nothing left. You can hardly get more basic than that.

What are those ingredients? We dug back into the stories of two decades ago and began to read all over again. What we got out of it were a pair of inflamed eyes and considerably more than a glimmering of what we firmly believe to be the truth.

It seems to us that fiction of the future no longer concerns

(Concluded on page 130)

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PROFESSOR MAINBOCHER'S PLANET

By IVAR JORGENSEN

Johnny had no desire to be a hero. His job was to gather news. Period. But the time came when he was confronted with two nerve-wracking crises: he was in danger—and he was in love!

AS SOON as he saw his hand, Johnny Mitchell, of *Interplanetary News Service*, was certain something earthshaking would happen. Three big aces and two lovely queens. He was notoriously unlucky at cards—even to the point where fate conspired with outside forces every time he got a decent hand.

Fate's outside force this time was none other than Sam Haney, Feature Editor. Haney's face appeared on the intercom with its usual scowl and he barked, "Mitchell—I want you."

Johnny said, "Sure, Chief. As soon as I finish this hand."



He recoiled sharply, fear



digging at his scalp. The trees were women—and alive!

"Now!"

"But Chief! Look—let me show you——."

"I'm not interested. Get up here immediately!"

Johnny shrugged in disgust. The cards were valueless now because they had been tipped and the rest of the reporters threw in their own hands. "Damn!" Johnny said.

"What was that?" Haney asked sharply.

"I said thanks for seeing to it the hand was killed. Money is so contaminating. I'll be right up."

The face faded from the intercom and Johnny went upstairs to hate it in the flesh. Sam Haney was a wispy little man whose sole interest in life was the unusual and colorful news story. He said, "I may have a big one for you."

"You just killed a big one for me."

Haney asked, "What was that?" He was slightly deaf—a condition that often saved Johnny's job as Haney would not admit the affliction and correct it with an electronic button.

"I said, it's a wonderful day to go out on an assignment and I can hardly wait to get started."

"I don't think that was what you said at all."

"You mean you're a trifle

hard of hearing?" Johnny asked innocently.

"Not at all. Do you remember a Professor Mainbocher?"

Johnny squinted at Haney's big ugly ears. "Mainbocher—Mainbocher. Oh, sure. He was that odd-ball scientist that got himself exiled from the system for doing funny things with plants.

"As I remember, he grew vegetable robots—crazy deals. Didn't he plant some kind of a bush under a sewing machine and when the bush matured it could hemstitch doilies or something?"

"Right," Haney said.

"But it was other experiments that got him exiled, wasn't it? He somehow generated animal urges in plants—sexual instincts. There was something about a banana tree and a pineapple—"

"We killed that story," Haney snapped. "But here's the pitch: A photographer named Jack Lane came in here with a tip that Mainbocher found himself a small planet out Orion way and set himself up in business again."

"Then why didn't this Lane go out and get the story?"

"Lack of finances. Lane is broke, so we'll do the financing and buy Lane's pics and send you along to get the details. Draw expenses from the

cashier and contact Lane at the Coronado Hotel."

"Okay." Johnny didn't look forward with any pleasure to a space jaunt in the company of some free-lance photographer. Most of them were conceited asses who felt reporters were nothing more than necessary evils. "I wonder if the guy plays poker," Johnny mused.

"What was that?"

"Huh?—Oh, I said I'd better contact this joker."

"Very well."

Johnny rose to leave. Haney stopped him at the door. "And take the North Star Line. It's nonscheduled and much cheaper than those lines that hike up the bill with a lot of unnecessary luxuries."

"Of course," Johnny said. "A reporter mustn't be spoiled with a comfortable bed or good meals enroute."

"What did you say?"

But Johnny Mitchell had closed the door behind him . . .

"You got a Jack Lane nesting here?" Johnny asked the clerk at the desk of the Coronado Hotel.

The clerk smiled dreamily and seemed lost in delicious thought. "I certainly have," he said fervently. "Room 1421."

Johnny went up, wondering

the while what this photographer had that could vibrate a room clerk. When the door opened, he found out—A pair of legs that would have broken up an octogenarian's convention—figure, face, and complexion to match—hazel eyes and high-lighted auburn hair. "You—you're his wife maybe," Johnny gulped.

"Wife?" she asked. "Whose wife?"

"Jack Lane's."

"I'm Jack Lane and I'm nobody's wife. Who are you?"

"Oh—it's short for Jacqueline I suppose."

"It's short for Jackson. My father wanted a boy."

Johnny blinked in admiration, feeling now that the desk clerk had shown admirable restraint. "Well, he sure did not get one."

"That was a personal matter between my father and mother. None of your affair. I asked who you are."

"I'm Johnny Mitchell from *Interplanetary*. My stupid chief gave me the idea—"

"No backbiting. Your chief is a fine man. He is furnishing me with money for an assignment and—" her gorgeous eyes turned somewhat doubtful—"and with you."

"Maybe I'd better come in."

"Perhaps you'd better."

Inside, Jack Lane gave her

new partner a drink and said, "Wait 'til I get out of this thing," meaning her revealing negligee.

Johnny regretted her impetuosity in this matter and finished his drink while she was changing. She reappeared in the conventional female garb of blouse, jacket, and slacks and said, "Well, let's get down to business." She caught the look in his eyes and added, "And I do mean strictly business."

"I thought you probably did. What do you know about Professor Mainbocher?"

"Nothing more than what I told Haney. The location of his planet—not a planet really, a conditioned asteroid—and the suspicion that he's probably up to his old tricks."

"If that's true it ought to make a wow of a picture story. Are you ready to start?"

"The sooner the better."

"Then let's go over to the North Star office and book passage."

Jack Lane's eyes widened. "North Star?"

Johnny shrugged. "*Interplanetary* gets us there. That's all they guarantee."

Jack Lane considered this annoyance in the way she tapped the floor with an impatient toe. "But suppose we

elected to go a quicker way. What would be *Interplanetary's* reaction?"

"The advance doesn't cover a quicker way."

"We could use our own money."

Johnny blinked. "Do we have money?"

"An old aunt left me some for a rainy day. I believe it is now raining. We'll take *Interstellar* to the Orion space platform and then charter a two-man scout."

Johnny blinked. "Auntie must have been really heeled."

"That was a matter between her and her banker," Jack snapped. "None of your affair."

"Okay—let's go set up connections."

The new team went to the space line offices and purchased two first class tickets. Jack Lane had a few other errands and by the time these were attended to, it was quite late and they stopped for dinner.

Halfway through the meal, Jack Lane put down her fork and said, "Damn! I forgot something."

"What?"

"I forgot to buy a camera."

There was bewilderment in Johnny's voice. "You mean you're a photographer and

you don't even own a camera?"

Jack Lane caught her lip between white, even teeth. "I broke it on my last assignment," she said hurriedly. "An indignant Venusian smashed it when he thought it was making faces at him."

Johnny let the subject drop and went on with his dinner. After a few minutes, he said, "That big dark lug over there. He's been staring all during dinner. I can't quite figure out whether he's merely lusting after you or whether he's sore about something. Want me to go over and clip him one?"

Jack Lane turned to look and her face went instantly pale. She quickly stifled the sudden fright in her eyes but her hand trembled as she set down her wine glass.

"I'll go bop him," Johnny said.

"Don't be absurd. I never saw the man in my life."

"Then it must have been something you ate," Johnny said and went on with his dinner.

The dark man turned up half an hour later in a place not conducive to pleasant social contact. He stepped from the mouth of an alley half a block from the hotel where the lights were dim. He pointed a gun.

He said, "Who's this monkey you've got in tow, Jack?" He spoke with contempt and handled the gun as though he knew how.

Johnny growled, "Now, wait a minute, mister," and the man snarled, "Shut up!" while Jack bit her beautiful lip and laid a hand on Johnny's arm.

Jack said, "Why don't you leave me alone, Lukas? Just because I let you take me to dinner once—"

"Dinner, she says!" the man called Lukas snarled. "We sat down and you headed for the washroom—only it wasn't the washroom. It was my room upstairs. I got a good idea what you were looking for, too."

Jack Lane had stiffened and was returning Lukas' contempt in the look she gave him. "And the dinner—wasn't it something in the nature of getting close to the enemy for the purpose of spying?"

Lukas flushed. "I don't know what you're talking about. Anyhow you and I are going for a walk and get some things straightened out."

"Oh, are we?"

"That's what I said." Lukas turned sneering eyes on Johnny Mitchell. "Get lost, punk. Your girl friend's got a previous—"

The word *date* got itself splashed all over Lukas' mouth along with blood and cut flesh as Johnny's right connected with a lot behind it. At the same time, Johnny got his hand on Lukas' gun and snatched it away.

Lukas went down against the wall gagging and cursing. Johnny said, "Sorry to spoil your teeth, but nobody calls me a punk."

He felt Jack tugging at his sleeve. "Let's get into the hotel where we'll be safe!"

"I feel pretty safe right here."

"Don't be a fool. This man is dangerous!"

Johnny looked down to where Lukas was groveling in the dirt trying to get to his feet. "Doesn't look like it. What does he do—spit death rays?"

"Johnny—*come on!*"

Jack Lane continued to tug at his arm and Johnny allowed himself to be led away and into the hotel. He got the key and they went upstairs where Johnny opened Jack's door. He said, "And now I think we'd better go in and have a little talk. There are a few questions—"

"I'm so tired," Jack cut in sweetly. Then, in order to get into her room unhindered, she paralyzed Johnny with a kiss

so that he was helpless for thirty seconds after the door closed in his face.

He went to a bar and sat down and thought it over. Jack Lane was obviously not what she represented herself to be. Probably not even a photographer. Something had gone on between Jack and the dark man. He had accused Jack of rifling his room. True or false? If true, what had been her reason and where did that leave her? As a common sneak thief?

Somehow, Johnny didn't think so and he fell to wondering what all this had to do with Professor Mainbocher. Also, he wondered—if Jack Lane were indeed not a photographer—why the girl had gone to the trouble of setting up this expedition. She evidently had enough money to go to Orion herself if she felt like it. Why call herself a photographer and drag a reporter along?

He finished off by pondering his own actions in the matter. He could either go along on faith and curiosity or demand a showdown and learn the score. But he had a feeling he wouldn't be given the right score anyhow, so he decided to go along for a while and, on that note, he went home to bed.

They boarded the big flagship of the Interstellar Spaceways and Johnny half-expected to see Lukas embarking also, but so far as he could tell, the dark man was not among the passengers.

Johnny had resolved to hold his peace and see what turn events took, but on the third day out—Earth time—he couldn't resist a few direct questions. He asked them in the roof lounge where he and Jack sat over Martinis, looking out into the depths of deep space.

"Listen, angel. Don't you think it's about time you leveled with me?"

"I don't understand."

"But you do, beautiful. In the first place, you aren't a photographer and what's more you know that I know you aren't. So you're not going after pics. Then what are you going after?"

Jack regarded him through eyes that could have melted a bronze statue. "Johnny, please trust me."

"Who said I didn't?"

"You did—when you started asking questions."

"Look—trust and blindness don't necessarily go hand in hand. Tell me what you're after and I'll still probably trust you."

Jack was silent, appearing

to be hunting the right words. She said, "What do you know about Professor Mainbocher?"

"Not much. Nothing except what I read before he was exiled and what Haney told me."

"Then I'll tell you more. Mainbocher is a fiend, Johnny. Under guise of being a scientist he performs horrible experiments because he delights in human suffering."

"Okay—I'll grant you that, but you aren't making this trip just to walk up to Mainbocher and say, 'Hello, you fiend, you.' Exactly why are you going?"

"Johnny—you've got to trust me. I can't tell you now. You'll find out in time."

"Then tell me this—why do you want me along? You aren't depending on *Interplanetary's* money to get you there. So why this song and dance about being a photographer after a picture story?"

Jack finished her drink and got up from the table. "You should be able to figure that out, Johnny."

"I should?"

He sat trying to do just that for a while and then went to the lower lounge and found a poker game in progress. There was no Chief to interrupt him though, so he got no full

houses—nothing but small pairs that cost money.

It was not until they had blasted into the Orion space platform and presented their credentials for travel beyond the patrolled area that the truth dawned on Johnny. Clear of customs and inspection, he turned suddenly upon his gorgeous traveling companion. "I get it. You couldn't get beyond the space station as a tourist. You had to be an accredited representative of some big outfit so you chose *Interplanetary*."

Jack smiled. "Something like that."

Johnny set down his bag. "So now that you're cleared, I'm excess baggage."

This frightened her. She laid a quick hand on his arm and he thrilled to the tips of his toes. She said, "No, Johnny! No! You mustn't ever believe that. I need you and I promise you'll get a good story. I'll even give it all to you—the money for the pics too."

Johnny looked at the new *Telescon V* camera hanging over Jack's shoulder. "How do I know we'll get any pics? Can you work that thing?"

"Oh, yes. I have a smaller model at home. This big one cost four thousand dollars. I

can take a clear picture through pitch blackness at three miles. The lens is as powerful as a small telescope and the film costs sixty dollars a roll."

"Then you actually did come up here to take pictures?"

Jack shook her head. "Not entirely. But I bought this expensive equipment because I didn't want to let you down, Johnny. I want you to get a good story."

"What's your other reason for coming?"

Jack was spared the necessity of either answering him or putting him off because at that moment Johnny jerked to attention and pointed across the compound. "He followed us!"

Jack's reaction was one of fright. "Lukas?"

"None other. See him? Over by the cafe entrance. He's looking for someone."

"Us—let's get out of here."

Jackie took him quickly by the arm and headed for the shelter of the outgoing ramp. Cut off from view, she slowed her pace and looked back. "Do you think he saw us?"

"I don't know, but why worry? Say the word and I'll go back and finish what I started in the alley."

Jack shuddered. "No, Lukas

isn't as easily disposed of as that. I'm not surprised that he followed us but I'd just as soon get off on the second leg of our trip without his knowing it."

"Does he know where we're headed?"

"Probably."

Johnny stopped. "Angel, did you actually burgle his room at the hotel?"

"Yes."

"What were you after?"

"Professor Mainbocher's location. I had to find out where he was. Lukas is his agent—his purchasing agent. He buys the things Mainbocher needs all over the system and also recruits—well, also procures other of Mainbocher's requirements. Let's hurry. Maybe we can charter a scout and get out into space before Lukas finds us."

Johnny shrugged. "Just as you say, but I think it would be smarter to leave him here in the hospital."

"It wouldn't work. You can't settle everything with your fists. You'd land in jail."

Johnny grinned. "If they put me in the same cell with you, sweetheart, I wouldn't mind a bit . . ."

They almost escaped Lukas but not quite. They had rented a cruiser, got their equipment

aboard, and Johnny was at the pilot table plotting the course into the automatic pilot from the figures Jack had stolen from Lukas' room. He was interrupted by Jack's hand on his shoulder, the sharp nails digging deep into the flesh.

"There! Coming up the ramp! He's found us!"

Johnny shrugged and said, "So what? We're battened in. What is there to be afraid of?"

"He has the police with him! He's trumped up some charge to stop us and we're under their jurisdiction until we pass the hundred mile limit. Quick! Blast off, Johnny!"

"But I haven't got the course."

"Get it later. You can mark a theoretical position after blast-off and proceed from there."

"It's a lot more work, but if you say so. Strap yourself down."

The cruiser was one of the newer scout types with twice the power its metal-strain component could stand and as Johnny hurled it into space he got a last look at Lukas' rage-stained face through the quartz pilot window. *That boy's sure mad at us*, he pondered as the terrific lift drag-

ged at his body. *I wonder why?*

After full acceleration was achieved he unstrapped himself and went to the cot where Jack had placed herself in restraint. The fearful drag had yanked the consciousness from her body and as he looked down at her still face, a lump formed in his throat. He had never seen such a beautiful girl. And all alone with her in a two-man scout off Orion. He continued to look, regretting the fact he had never learned the art of being a heel. What a wonderful place to be bereft of conscience and scruples. The thought shook him a little.

He knelt down and placed almost a reverent kiss upon the glowing lips. He held the kiss longer than he had intended. Then Jack's arms were around him and she was kissing him back without reserve.

She drew away finally and he whispered, "I love you, baby. I'm only a two-bit reporter without a dime in my pocket, but I love you a million dollars' worth."

Jack was not frightened. She smiled and rubbed her nose against his. "I'm surprised at you. Taking advantage of an unconscious girl strapped to a bed."

"I know I'm a heel, baby, but—"

"Johnny—please. You'll notice I'm not slapping your face or pushing you away, but I've got no time for love—yet. Maybe later. Maybe after—"

Johnny got control of himself and grinned. "You're a spoilsport. You ruined things by waking up. Think of the fun I could have had. Now; why don't you rustle up some sandwiches while I plot this damn course?"

She kissed him once more—swiftly. "What'll you have—catsup or chili sauce?"

"I'm a mayonnaise man at heart . . ."

The planet came in on schedule, a small world, hardly more than an asteroid. They circled it three times and found nine-tenths of it to be completely arid and without atmosphere.

The remaining portion was dense jungle, obviously artificial, supported by a sectional atmosphere unit and a subterranean condenser. Near the jungle area lay a blast pit but no ships were in sight.

"Lukas will come," Jack said, "but maybe we can do what we came for and get off before he gets here."

"Look," Johnny retorted, "we came here to interview

Professor Mainbocher. We're accredited representatives of *Interplanetary* and at the worst I should only have to apologize to Lukas."

"No, Johnny."

"What do you mean—no?"

"I mean that so far as Mainbocher is concerned, we are deadly enemies. He will have us killed on sight—or worse."

"I don't necessarily believe you but you interest me. What does the *worse* entail?"

Jack shuddered. "If we walk through that jungle you will see and understand—that and other things. You'll see why Mainbocher has gone too far to receive even a press representative with other than hostility—deadly hostility."

"Look, all that rumor and gossip about his experiments—"

"Were entirely true. Mainbocher is the devil incarnate. Evil personified."

Johnny turned and took Jack by the shoulders. "Then tell me why you've come here."

"To kill him!"

"Why? What did he ever do to you?"

"He — my sister — he — Johnny! I can't talk about it. All I know is that the beast must die. Only then will I be

happy." She took a small, powerful gun from her pocket. "This is for him, Johnny."

"Jack, I'm not going to let you go in there feeling as you do. I'm going to set down on that field now and go out and look things over. You wait here until I come back."

Jack nodded submissively. "Very well."

Johnny was elated that he got no argument from her. He set the scout down, donned a space suit, and Jack let him out through the hatch. "Be careful," she said, and kissed the window in his helmet before he went out onto the arid field.

One of the main reasons for his doubt of Jack's conviction relative to the great Mainbocher was the complete lack of defenses. No armament was in sight; no guard living or otherwise was set to bar the intruder's way. Therefore, Mainbocher could hardly be in bad conscience.

Johnny moved toward the jungle fringe and he had not gone fifty feet before he was speedily disillusioned as to Mainbocher's lack of defense.

It came in form of beauty—a swarm of gorgeously colored lights dancing gracefully in the airless void. The cloud of vari-colored globes emerged

from the trees of the jungle and advanced to meet Johnny—as though to welcome him gaily to the domain of the mysterious professor.

Johnny stopped and stood there, enjoying the spectacle. The colored globes, uniform in size to the approximate dimensions of a bowling ball, possessed two arms each.

Then, while Johnny still stood in admiration, they attacked in a vicious swirl of fury. This surprised Johnny but he was not greatly alarmed, feeling entirely safe from harm within the thick rubber of his suit.

Then truth dawned. He was not safe at all. At the tip of each extended arm was a powerful pincer. The globes were ferocity personified in their deadly attack and in an instant Johnny was fighting for his life with several gashes sliced in his suit.

To his eternal good fortune, he discovered that the globes themselves were not invulnerable. They collapsed under the pressure of his hands, spouting a sticky substance that was amazingly like blood. Their advantage lay in their speed of movement and the power in the sharp pincers at the tips of their arms.

Johnny fought them as he would have fought a swarm of

vicious bees. But he knew he was fighting a losing battle if he stood his ground. For each smashed globe, two more appeared. Air was fast escaping from his torn suit.

Desperately, he struggled toward the jungle fringe. There lay his only hope of salvation. He must have smashed dozens of the globes enroute but before he reached the thick undergrowth, they were like a dazzling wall barring his way.

He crashed through and hurled himself into the bushes where he lay exhausted. If he found no protection here, he was done. Gasping for the oxygen he found within the effective area of the atmosphere plant, he waited for the small knives to cut away his suit and go to work on his flesh.

But the attack was over. The colored globes were helpless in the thick bushes protecting him. They circled and dived in frustrated fury above his head and then gathered in a thick, blazing cloud just above the level of the bushes.

Johnny parted the bushes narrowly and watched them. Would they hold him trapped in this spot? Ride along above him marking his progress if he attempted to crawl away?

This last was his new fear

but it did not materialize. After what seemed to be a conference among themselves, the globes began circling again, then streaked away in a dazzling display of magnificence.

When he was sure they had left and that it was not a tactical ruse, Johnny got to his feet and began peeling off his suit. He was not sure that they would not return but resolved to stay close to undergrowth which had proved to be absolute protection from their deadly assault.

And now what? he wondered. This was a fine way for a scientist to greet a member of the fourth estate. Mainbocher was going to have a hell of a time talking his way out of this little prank.

Johnny was more angry at himself than Mainbocher, however. His own position was far from being invulnerable. He realized that preoccupation with the gorgeous Jack Lane had caused him to arrive as an intruder rather than a man with a legitimate mission.

He should have made previous contact with Mainbocher so that the latter would have been expecting him. After all, the scientist had valuable installations here no

doubt and was entirely within his rights in protecting them. If that protection bordered upon the bizarre, it was no business of Johnny Mitchell.

Free of the suit, Johnny attempted to orientate himself so as to move through the jungle toward the two tall gray chimneys his turns around Mainbocher's planet had revealed.

He estimated them to be at about the center of the jungle area. He retrieved the small flashlight with which his space suit was equipped, thanking his luck that such had been provided, since Mainbocher's planet was without benefit of solar illumination. It was a place of eternal star-lit night, lighted dimly from the glitter of the stars and the faint blue reflection of two far moons that appeared to be stationary.

Therefore the jungle was black as pitch. Johnny switched on the light, taking a forward step at the same moment. But he got nowhere. His right ankle was being firmly held.

He turned his beam downward in order to ascertain the cause. He stared for a moment in horror at what he beheld. But even this horror was not great enough to hold his attention because in arc-

ing down the beam from the flashlight he had got a flash of what appeared to be greater horrors. He threw the beam forward again and stood frozen at what he beheld . . .

The beautiful Jack Lane had but one ambition in life—to get close enough to the vile Mainbocher to put a bullet through his rotten heart. This was the be-all and end-all of her existence—her dedicated mission—she neither plotted nor allowed her mind to dwell upon anything beyond. Only the attack was important because she cared not whether there would be an opportunity to retreat. She prayed only that she be allowed close enough for a fatal shot. For this she would put her own life into destiny's cash register as payment. And could destiny ask more?

As soon as Johnny had quit-
ted the ship, Jack got into the second space suit. She could see Johnny moving across the arid field, his suit revealed as a dark blot by the glow of a million stars and two moons. She caught her breath at the sheer beauty of the globe swarm. What sort of a scientific wonder was this? she asked herself.

Jack waited until she was sure Johnny had reached the

jungle. Then she moved quickly because she wanted to be well on her way before he returned.

She crossed the field at an angle that would bring her into the jungle quite a distance from Johnny's point of entrance. As she moved through the gloom, she saw the multi-colored swarm rise and circle and then move in her direction. Their glittering beauty was such as to almost stop her as she felt an urge to let them come close. She would have enjoyed a nearer inspection of the gorgeous lights. But she had a mission and with it in mind she moved resolutely forward.

So, just as the globes whirled in for the attack, Jack Lane slipped in through the jungle fringe and began stripping away her space suit.

Clear of encumbrance, Jack Lane checked the equipment she had brought: a flashlight, a gun, a razor-edged machete. She was clad in a single, skin-tight garment of soft black leather. Knowing the nature of the obstacles ahead, she had ordered this garment specially made. It was incredibly light, yet would resist the sharpest of thorns and brambles. The machete would protect her from other perils.

The gun was for Mainbocher.

She flashed on the light and stood for a moment revealed as a slim, gorgeous cat—a sleek black leopard ready to prowl the night in search of vengeance.

She was well-aware of the perils she would face—the hellish nature of Mainbocher's fiendish manifestations and she moved cautiously keeping her light beamed ahead, steeling her mind against the things she saw, keeping her eyes off them as much as possible.

She had planned long and well, but events speedily proved how helpless she really was when pitted against the wily Mainbocher—how futile her weapons—how childish her stealth—how deadly the peril into which she stepped.

She had gone scarcely ten paces when she was seized from behind with a grip of iron. The machete was shaken from her hand, the gun jerked rudely from the holster against her sleek abdomen, the light whipped from her fingers.

A hand went over her mouth as she sought to scream and a gruff voice said, "Well, let's see what we have here."

Jack's mind, working

through her terror, divined that there were two of them—great hulks of men with rough, hairy hands. She could not see them because while one held her from behind, the other blazed her own light into her face. Coarse laughter signaled their delight with what they had captured.

"This one's a real beauty. What's she got on, anyhow?"

The one holding Jack growled close to her ear, "Some kind of leather. She dressed for speed, that's sure."

A low, unpleasant laugh. "I'll bet it'd come off real easy."

The other voice was charged with both eagerness and fear. "Now wait a minute—"

"But who'd know? We'd just be an hour late in delivering her, that's all. We could be real careful with this thing she's wearing and put it back on her so's the Prof wouldn't know the difference."

"She might tell him."

"But he wouldn't believe her. It would her word against ours. How about it?"

While Jack fought the sick terror that arose from anticipation of their next move, the man who apparently led the team, pitted fear of consequence against lustful temptation.

Finally he said, "I don't

think so. It's risky. She's a real dream but it isn't worth it."

The words dampened the hot lust of the other. "It isn't fair," he growled. "Mainbocher will probably give her to Lukas first anyhow. Do you remember that blonde back on Earth?"

At mention of the blonde, Jack Lane erupted into a raging feline fury. She almost escaped, and it was only through the aid of the second man that she was again subdued.

When she was once more held helpless, the leader growled, "Come on—let's get her into the castle before something happens. This she-devil's tough to handle."

"I guess we'd better."

And so Jack Lane was dragged away to a fate so hideous that the thought of it sickened her to the depths of her being. She had failed. Mainbocher had won. Now she only prayed that Johnny Mitchell would get safely away from Mainbocher's planet . . .

The grip on Johnny Mitchell's ankle tightened and he threw the beam of his flash downward. A dark green tendril, an arm of jungle growth had moved into his path and

wrapped itself around his ankle in even the brief moment he had stood motionless.

He stared in fascination at the perceptible movement of the vegetation. With amazingly animate action, its green tip went snakelike around his ankle, feeling its way, leaving its quickly-sprouting green anchors and moving on.

Johnny was snapped from the spell by a sudden sharp pain just above his foot. He jerked his leg, realizing that the anchors of the tendril were parasitic mouths and that the lower ones were even now seeking his flesh.

He jerked away sharply, but found to his horror that the tendril had sinewy strength and at his first jerk it reacted instantly, constricting like a living python and feverishly seeking to anchor more parasitic mouths to his flesh.

Panic gripped him and he tore wildly at the slithering coils. The tendril was fighting also, ravenous for its prey, loath to concede defeat.

Johnny tore away with the added-strength afforded him by his panic. The tendril was ripped away from whatever bindings it had had to its source and was now lashing in free panic.

Johnny stamped the green vegetable flesh with his free foot, rending and mangling it until the tendril became slimy green pulp and fell away from his leg.

Johnny sidestepped the now-dead mass and flashed his light over the ground. He chose a spot that was comparatively clear and placed himself in the exact center of it. Then he flashed his light over the surrounding circle. From all sides, he saw exploring green tendrils move out as though some mysterious sense told them prey was within reach.

He shuddered in disgust and almost reluctantly turned his light back upon the greater hideousness he had glimpsed before the creeper's attack.

His light picked out what his eyes told him was a grove—but a grove such as mortal eyes had never seen outside a dream of delirium.

A grove of women.

He forced his mind to accept the visual impression because only by doing that could he force his mind to analyze what the eyes reported.

The grove consisted of perhaps two dozen naked female figures. They were in various states of whatever fiendish evolution was taking place.

Some had the predominating appearance of female bodies rooted to the soil. Others had the appearance of trees with only an indication of the human development. They were all voiceless save for a faint, continuous moaning that was remindful of wind stirring leaves.

Johnny, wet with perspiration, turned weak from the shock of this terrible sight—of two life forces blending in this terrible grove—the animal and the vegetable.

But which was the predominating and what was the trend of this obscene, artificial evolution? Were the trees turning into human females? Or were the women being transformed into trees?

Johnny moved slowly toward the grove. Like a man hypnotized, he went among them, instinctively staying beyond reach of the graceful branch arms.

One slim, dark girl was hardly transformed at all. *She's just been planted*, Johnny's mind observed and he viciously rejected the thought because of the hideousness of its implication. He moved closer to the girl.

She stood erect, her face set and expressionless, yet obviously there was life in her

body. But what manner of life? Could she feel? Think? Suffer?

Johnny came nearer and flashed his beam straight into her beautiful dark eyes. The pupils reacted; then came facial expression. But slowly. In a manner remindful of the lethargic movements of vegetable growth, the gentle oval face took on a look of entreaty that transcended the glow of suffering. The lips opened with what seemed supreme effort and from the delicate throat came a sound somewhat different from the chorus of soft lament.

And though there were no words, Johnny's horrified mind translated the appeal—*Help me—help me—help me.*

So definite was the plea for mercy that Johnny spoke out in his bewilderment. "But what can I do? How can I help? What has been done to you?"

Immediately there was reaction throughout the whole grove. It caught Johnny's attention to a point where he did not notice the arms of the dark girl moving slowly out in his direction—seeking to embrace him.

The reaction took the form of suddenly increased activity among the women as though a wind had sprung up—a

wind Johnny could not feel—to set the branch-arms writhing and send the moaning chorus to a higher pitch.

Then, as it had come from the throat of the dark girl, Johnny sensed rather than heard the various pleas. They were a blending of two general entreaties: one an augmentation of the dark girl's plea for help; the other a demand of anger—a snarling animal cry for vengeance:

Bring us Mainbocher. Give us the beast. Put the foul Mainbocher within reach of our arms.

Suddenly Johnny knew he had to get away from this terrible grove or his reason would totter. He turned to flee. But the time of flight had passed. It was too late. With a final, superhuman effort, the arms of the dark girl went around him. With a strength taken from the soil of the planet or from the desperation of agony and madness, the girl clung to him and drew him close.

Until he was hard against her slim, naked body, his face buried in the cold flesh of her breast.

And into his mind the unfortunate girl was sending a message—the answer to his question:

Kill me—kill me—only in death will I find relief.

But helpless against the terrible strength of those slim and graceful arms, it became apparent to Johnny that he would find death far sooner than the dark girl he had been pitying.

He set his own strength against the pressure but his efforts were puny in comparison. In another few moments his spine would snap like a twig . . .

Sick with the misery of her failure and with what lay ahead, Jack Lane was dragged roughly along a jungle path and into a great clearing in its heart.

In the center of the clearing, reflected by the eternal light of the two still moons, stood the brooding castle of Professor Mainbocher.

The Professor had not built the castle nor had he constructed the atmosphere unit or the condenser that made the jungle portion of the planet habitable.

They had been there long before the Professor came to the Orion segment; built and abandoned by some man or group of men who had been dust long before the first cave-man of Earth had put a stone on the end of a stick and

beaten his first animal to death.

Memory of who built the castle had faded before the history of the System around Sol had encompassed intelligent beings. But built to withstand the ages, it had not suffered from the assaults of time.

The two guards dragged Jack Lane across the clearing and over a bridge that led to the entrance of the castle. From a high niche above the bridge, their advance was challenged.

"We bring a prisoner," the leader called.

"The girl Professor Mainbocher was looking for," the other supplemented.

"Bring her in."

The interior of the castle was possessed of the gloomy dignity foretold by its exterior. The mind of one not occupied by more important things could have wondered at the similarity of this architecture to that of the medieval baronial establishments of Europe on far-away Earth; and might have pondered as to whether the results of human endeavor are not pretty much the same wherever chance sets a planet to which Man can cling.

The vast, shadowy main hall was lit by flaring pitch

tapers, obviously an attempt by Professor Mainbocher to recreate the medieval atmosphere, since, with his science, he could have illuminated every nook and cranny with blazing light from a mere pinch of uranium.

Great musty banners hung upon the twenty-foot walls and the ceiling was a dim mystery high above flying buttresses.

But Jack Lane was interested in none of this. She occupied the time of passage through the great hall by steeling herself against what lay ahead. She did not fear death so much as she feared *showing* fear before the monster who awaited her. Whatever the price, she would hold her head high and breathe contempt to the very last.

Thus, she was a breathtaking, regal figure as she was led into the presence of Mainbocher. Head high, eyes flashing, she was a queen in the midst of loathsome creatures who had stepped beyond the bounds of decency into the slough of bestiality.

A rare prize for one of Mainbocher's degenerate and sadistic leanings.

The audience took place in a huge room at the center of which stood a great desk of

dark, gleaming wood. Behind this desk sat Mainbocher.

He was a small man who appeared to be in his latter years, yet one could not be sure. His head was magnificent and seemed sadly mismatched with his sparse body. Two eyes were set like bright jewels in a face that would have done credit to a saint. His high forehead commanded instant respect and his white hair seemed alive and electrically vibrant.

His voice was a soft purr. When the two guards hesitated he called, "Bring the lady forward. We must renew our acquaintance."

As the trio advanced across the broad flagstone floor, Mainbocher's eyes gleamed in admiration. "What a gorgeous specimen of womanhood," he purred. Then, "Do you realize my dear, that you could well be the most perfect woman in this or any other universe?"

"What do you want of me?" Jack's tone was the cracking of a contemptuous whip.

"I might ask the same of you. You arrive uninvited and creep through the night of my planet with no indication of good will."

"I bear you no good will. I have only loathing for you. Loathing, and a question."

"I deplore the former and

will gladly answer the latter if I am able."

"What did you do with my sister?"

"Your sister?"

"What have you done with her?"

Mainbocher contemplated Jack Lane's beautiful body before he replied, "My dear—there have been so many women in my life. Describe your sister."

Jack knew the monster was toying with her but thought it best to answer. "Her name was Leo. She was my twin sister. We were alike in every detail except that she was a golden blonde. You—"

Mainbocher was shaking his head. "No, my dear. Not entirely alike. One as versed in female anatomy as I, could find many differences. Small ones, but nonetheless significant. You are your sister's peer in every department. In the light of your beauty, hers would have paled somewhat."

Jack's knees trembled. "You use the past tense. Does that mean Leo is dead?"

Mainbocher was enjoying himself. "You used the past tense also. Does that mean you believe her dead?"

Jack flashed queenly contempt. "I can only say that, knowing what a beast you are, I hope she *is* dead. I can only

pray her death was not as horrible as you would be capable of making it."

Mainbocher flushed. Jack's tone and words were getting under his skin. He bit back a sharp retort and said, "No, Leo is not dead."

"What have you done to her?"

Mainbocher ignored the question. "But I can also add that when you yourself have achieved her present form, you will again outstrip her in physical beauty."

"Stop talking in riddles! Tell me where Leo is."

Mainbocher would have preferred servility and fear in his prisoner. He certainly was not getting it and wondered if he ever would. It was a part of the pattern a sadist of his type required from a victim in order to achieve complete satisfaction from the act of degrading, and he wondered if Jack, in the end, would beg and plead for mercy as her sister had done? Would that fine, regal contempt of hers turn to water in the face of the reality in store for her?

"I plan that you again meet your sister," he said. "There is no time like the present." He got up from his chair. "Come."

Jack said, "If you will tell these two to take their hands off me, I promise I will give you no trouble. I'm certainly intelligent enough to know it would do me no good."

Mainbocher considered, then shook his head. "No, my dear, I realize you are quite sincere in your promise, but I doubt if you would be able to keep that promise when confronted with what lies ahead."

"You beast! You rotten beast!"

Mainbocher scowled. "I care not for your descriptive terms. How would you enjoy being stripped of that garment and forced to be hauled naked to the place you are going?"

Jack threw her head high. "I apologize," she said with fine contempt. "You are a thoroughgoing gentleman with only kindness and good will for your fellow man."

"That's better. Come."

With the two guards still in attendance, Jack was led from the room and through a doorway. Beyond this portal, the medieval atmosphere vanished like smoke in a high wind. The corridor ahead was of shining aluminum, brilliantly lighted from the glow of shadowless tubes running its length. After a seemingly

incredible distance, Mainbocher turned in through another doorway. There he stopped and smiled.

"I think it well that I carry you through the evolutionary progress followed by your sister before I show you the final result. My explanations will be, of course, sketchy—as the minutes would take too long and you would not be able to grasp a tenth of it."

"Go on with your cat and mouse game," Jack said. "There is nothing I can do to prevent it."

"You will understand later that I am doing you a favor, my dear." He spoke in a kind, fatherly tone that made the beautiful Jack Lane yearn for the power to crush his skull to fragments.

Mainbocher indicated a narrow, upright cage. "Your sister was first restrained in this trap. You'll note that it demands its occupant stand upright at all times and affords little room for movement. It was required because quite a few injections had to be administered as a prelude to the experiment."

Mainbocher moved on. "This was the table upon which she was strapped for the second phase of the experiment."

"You madman!" Jack snapped.

Mainbocher favored her with a keen look. "I'm aware of what you are thinking, my dear, and let me relieve you of your erroneous impression. I am a scientist and am interested only in science. Therefore your sister was treated with complete impersonality. I had no interest whatever in her sex other than in the manner upon which it bore on the experiment. I assure you that her honor remained unsullied."

"Do you expect me to believe that? Perhaps you are beyond that sort of thing but these animals were no doubt in attendance." She indicated the guards.

"They obey my orders." He continued to regard Jack. "However, I am not above human instincts and I will give you no assurance that your fate will not be more—ah, shall we say, more personal than that of your sister."

Jack flushed with disgust as she was led through another doorway where Mainbocher pointed to still another cage. "This," he said, "was the abode of Leo during the last stages of the experiment." The object of his attention was a plain, low, steel-barred

affair—the ordinary type in which small jungle beasts are kept. It would have held a small gorilla, a lion, a tiger.

Jack had little time to reflect upon this because Mainbocher swiftly motioned her guards forward and they half-dragged her into an alcove where he switched on a light and pointed dramatically. "And there," he said. "Is the final, successful result of my great contra-evolutionary attempt."

Jack's mind, refusing to accept what she saw, sought the refuge of unconsciousness. Glassy-eyed, she stared at the sleek blonde leopard that paced the cage Mainbocher was indicating. The leopard bared its gleaming teeth and snarled, and Jack carried the terrible sound with her behind the dark curtain of mental blankness.

Instantly, Mainbocher was beside her, peering intently into her face. He opened an eye and studied the pupil. Then he stood back and smiled.

"Amazing—how simple it is when one really understands the fabric of the human mind. I do believe we've achieved success on the first try..."

No human being could face

the horror confronting Johnny Mitchell and remain unchanged. Confronted by this manifestation of pure terror, the human mind had to give in some direction.

But no man, scientist or otherwise, has the power to conceive or understand the depths of the human brain and the human spirit—the hidden power lying deep below even the subconscious—the sources of strength upon which Man's mental fiber can draw in terrible emergency.

Therefore, madness is not necessarily the refuge of all humans when confronted with hideousness too great to assimilate. There are myriad possibilities.

Johnny Mitchell's mental strength was such that he reverted. Far from losing grasp upon his mental faculties, he took a fresh grip upon them with the rough and brutal hands used in some forgotten age by his ancestors before the dawn of history.

Self-preservation reared huge and strong within him and he reverted to the primal, self-sustaining animal.

As the soft, cold arms went around him, all genteel instincts vanished and he became a raging beast. With a throaty roar he attacked the dark girl with teeth and fists

and brute strength. In savage rage he tore away the roots that held the thing in the soil and flung it away from him.

Then, with the sure instinct of the brute that faces what he does not understand, Johnny Mitchell fled the grove and raced away through the jungle.

After what seemed an infinite length of time, the torture in his lungs forced him to a halt. He dropped to the ground, panting for breath. But only a few seconds of this before he realized the vulnerability of his position.

He came immediately to a crouch, every sense alert, still breathing heavily, but now on guard.

It was well he did so because at that moment the bushes parted and a man stepped into the small glade in which he had fallen.

Their eyes met. Johnny saw a huge, heavy-browed brute with a scowl on his face and a whip in his hand.

The guard on the other hand, saw a cowering newcomer, cringing in fright at what he had already faced in Mainbocher's jungle. The guard grinned in contempt. A few strokes of the whip would separate this fool from what remained of his sanity. The

guard advanced, uncoiling the whip.

Johnny waited, crouched, with all the power of his body coiled upon the catapult of his ankles. The guard took one step—two. He raised his whip arm.

Johnny hurled himself like a silent snake straight at the man's throat.

The guard went down with a scream of sudden terror. But this was speedily drowned by the savage roar from Johnny Mitchell's own throat as the force of his driving body brought the other down, as his powerful hands took the thick throat into viselike grip.

The guard's eyes bulged. "Mercy!" he croaked. "In God's name—mercy!"

Johnny laughed. "What does a thing like you know of God? I should kill you for mentioning His name."

The guard had no stomach for combat and lay in craven submission. Johnny released some of the pressure on his throat and the man gabbled incoherently in pure terror.

"How does death look face-to-face?" Johnny asked.

The guard squealed pitifully.

And not having reached the point where he could kill for the pure love of triumph—as

his pre-dawn ancestors killed—Johnny released his grasp of the guard's throat and got slowly to his feet.

He stood silent, regarding the craven as a lion would regard a jackal—as one of the nobler creatures of a true jungle would look upon a rodent.

The guard scrambled to his feet and fled. Just upon reaching the edge of the glade, he tripped over his own feet and emitted another squeal of terror. Then he vanished, crashing away through the jungle like a terrified jackal to which honor meant nothing—to which nothing was important except the salvation of his miserable life.

Johnny Mitchell laughed.

He stood for a time in the open glade, looking up at the two moons that were visible through the opening in the vegetation above. Never in his life had he felt such fierce happiness. It was as though civilization, shed like a garment, left him with an exhilarating sense of freedom he had never before known.

Into his heart came the realization of complete self-sufficiency — something the civilized man can never know. The civilized man who depends upon the police for the safety of his person and his

belongings; upon others for his food and shelter; upon a doctor for his physical health and upon others of his kind for companionship.

Johnny felt like crying out in sheer joy, but discretion forbade this. Instead he looked up at the two moons and tried to judge the location of the castle.

After deciding upon a direction, he set out confidently through the thick jungle growth. He had gone scarcely a hundred yards when his senses told him he was not alone. He was crossing a sluggish creek at that moment, leaping from rock to rock in a shallow place where such a crossing was possible.

Balancing upon a boulder in the exact center of the creek, he froze, waiting. Perhaps the camouflage of light and shadow would hide him if the enemy proved too formidable for direct attack.

As he stood there a weird figure emerged from the jungle and approached the creek. A man, obviously, but Johnny had to look twice to be sure. He was tall, broad and all of him was alive but his face. That appeared to be quite dead.

There was complete lack of expression in the eyes and the

mouth hung slack as though the man had not the strength to close it. He gibbered in a sing-song monotone and when he came to the shore of the creek he got down on his hands and knees and drank noisily like an animal.

This act completed, he got to his feet and looked around as though his plans did not go beyond this moment, as though he was incapable of formulating plans.

Even if he had completely reverted—which he had not—Johnny would have known this was no foe and would have treated him gently. Because primitive man had a pity for the insane that amounted to almost a respect. Even savage animals have been known to turn and slink away from the two-year-old mind in the adult body.

The man crossed the creek by the process of wading into the water. It reached his waist at its greatest depth and at this point he was close beside the motionless Johnny Mitchell.

He stopped and stared and finally a vacant grin found its way onto his pitiful face. Then the expression was wiped away and the man moved on, singing monotonously to himself, never looking back.

Johnny listened until the sound of the man's footsteps died in the distance, then went thoughtfully upon his way.

He approached the castle and stood for a time in the shelter of the surrounding forest, his keen eyes studying the structure. To the old Johnny Mitchell entrance would have seemed possible only at the doors provided for that purpose.

But now it was different. He saw at least ten paths up what would have looked to others like the sheer wall of the castle's sides. Not so with Johnny. He saw these walls as a scientist sees the smooth surface of one's hand through a microscope—replete with jagged protuberances—rough as the surface of a forest when viewed from above its tree tops.

To him it was merely a matter of selecting the window through which he wished to make his entrance. Most of them were dark so he could not tell whether they were open or closed.

But one large window high in the wall gave forth a dim light; dim, but bright enough to show Johnny that the window was open several inches from the bottom.

He grinned, sent his eyes on a lightning-tour of the open area, and when they reported all quiet, he streaked across the courtyard and was soon pressing himself against the cold masonry.

He waited a few more moments. Then he removed his shoes and placed one foot on the first protruding stone. His hands sought and found other irregularities and he was soon moving up the wall, a feat that would have astounded the guards of this strange castle had they been in a position to witness it.

But they were not there, nor did they come, because Johnny ascended with the silence of a caterpillar crawling over the surface of a velvet glove.

Closer and closer he came, the lighted window greatening above him until his powerful hands closed over its sill and he drew a cautious head upward for a look into the room. Finding it vacant, he dropped inside, landing on the stone floor with the grace of a jungle animal.

Again he stood for a while and again following his instincts, he marked several places behind the dark, towering drapes as havens of possible concealment.

Then he turned his atten-

tion to the room itself. A strange place, like something out of a medieval painting.

A great desk stood in its exact center and to this he directed his soft steps. Then, leaving his ears on guard, he opened the first drawer and began his investigation. That this was Mainbocher's desk became apparent immediately and Johnny went through the papers he found with rapt attention. Soon he was scowling thoughtfully to himself.

He perused a small notebook for a long time, dwelling quite a while on a single passage in small crabbed handwriting on a back page:

The ideal mind from the scientist's standpoint is one with nothing in it. The mind of the person termed insane. Such a mind is stripped of frustrating barriers of psychosis and all traps and pitfalls stemming from what is erroneously termed reason. Such a mind is like an idling motor, waiting for direction and manipulation. It is a room with the shades drawn.

Johnny pondered those words. In a way, they strengthened his early suspicions as to what really went on here on Mainbocher's planet.

It was merely a vague idea but there was a way he could

verify it or prove it false. With this in mind, he bestirred himself.

But with his legs still trapped between the desk and chair, the sound of footsteps in the outer hall rapidly approached the room.

Johnny moved like a lithe animal. In three bounds he was across the room and had secreted himself behind a drape as three men entered the room.

Satisfied that he had not been discovered, Johnny opened a slit in the drapes and peered out. The man walking in the lead was Professor Mainbocher. Johnny identified the man from photos he'd seen in the past.

The other two were cut from the same mold as the unfortunate victim of Johnny's rage in the jungle. Johnny wondered swiftly if the other had returned with word of the attack and thus precipitated a crisis. He regretted not killing the guard now, certain as he had been that the man clearly deserved death.

But the subject was not brought up. Mainbocher sat down at the desk while the other two stood before it in servile attitudes.

Mainbocher said, "The man

—haven't you apprehended him yet?"

"No, sir," one of the guards said.

"He must be rather clever, sir," the other added. "He keeps eluding us no matter how careful we are."

"Then why are you here? Why are you not out searching for him?"

"By prearrangement all six of us were to return to the castle after searching two hours. All have returned but Hewitt. We heard what sounded like cries of distress earlier but thought little of them until Hewitt did not return. We instituted search and have been unable to find either Hewitt or the girl's companion."

"Hewitt is probably asleep under a bush somewhere. When he returns send him to me. I'll make him wish he'd attended to business."

"And the other?"

"Keep searching — what else?"

"Yes, sir."

"And I want results or there will be trouble for all of you. I'm tired of your inefficiency."

"Yes, sir."

"You may go."

The guards left and Professor Mainbocher continued to sit at his desk, going over pa-

pers and making notes in several ledgers and books.

During this time, Johnny stood behind the drape, wishing the Professor would suddenly remember tasks elsewhere. He debated the wisdom of confronting the famous blackguard but caution held him back. Possibly it was that fact that he had things to learn and did not want to make contact with Mainbocher until he was on surer ground.

Finally, Mainbocher got up and left the room. In a flash Johnny was at the window casement and out in the night where only his dexterity at the new-found art of climbing impossible walls held him from disaster.

He went down as swiftly and surely as he had ascended; but once more upon firm footing, he found that his luck at remaining hidden had run out.

He turned to see, not twenty feet away, a huge, red-eyed hound; a dog of magnificent proportions which stood with its great head slightly lowered, its huge front legs partially spread in the classic pose of the killer about to leap for the throat of its prey.

A chill ran down Johnny's spine at sight of the awful

beast. Its white teeth gleamed with what was almost a baleful phosphorescence in the pale light of the two watching moons.

Then the beast sprang, savage and silent, at the throat of the intruder.

Johnny—the old Johnny would have been doomed. In an instant his throat would have been ripped out and the hound, its great paws on his still chest, sounding a wild animal note of savage victory.

But this was the new Johnny, drawing upon wisdom learned through ages of savagery, and he was not even greatly frightened as his hands, bidden by instinct alone, caught firmly and surely at the beast's two slaving jaws as they came within reach.

He held the hound as though in two mighty vises spreading the red jaws wide and using them as handles to lift the great body from the ground; lift the huge head close to his own until he was staring into the beast's savage, fearless eyes.

Johnny smiled grimly, thinking. "Even in such a position as this, you give shame to your human masters, dog. You do not whine or beg mercy though you stand on the brink of death.

You ask no quarter or give none and cowardice is a civilized trait of which you know nothing."

He killed the beast as quickly and painlessly as possible and then melted among the shadows to move again into the forest. Back as he had come went this strangely reverted reporter, using the strength from the past and the curiosity garnered from his profession in the civilized world of the present.

He moved with a new sureness until he located the space suit he had discarded at the edge of the jungle.

The scout ship had evidently not been molested and Johnny felt a twinge of conscience at having left Jack Lane alone so long. He thought of his love for Jack. Did it still exist? It seemed a thousand years had passed since he had ventured forth onto Mainbocher's planet. Was he the same man who had taken the beautiful Jack into his arms and told her of his love?

He was not sure. He was no longer sure of anything except that he had just begun to live. Ruminating thus, he reached the scout and his heart missed a beat when he saw the escape hatch door standing open a few inches.

They had found Jack and had taken her!

He climbed into the ship, closed the escape hatch and went through the inner door. He looked around. Evidently there had been no struggle. Nothing was misplaced. Strange. They must have come upon Jack completely unaware because she would certainly have put up a thorough fight.

He stood for a few moments, sinking into the depths of despair. Perhaps Jack was already dead. Perhaps she had died horribly while he prowled Mainbocher's planet.

Then the despair vanished and there arose within Johnny Mitchell a rage and hatred such as he had never before known. A killing lust that can come only to an animal or a primitive man with the knowledge that his mate has been taken and slain.

No longer was there doubt in his savage mind as to his feeling for Jack Lane. He walked to a cabinet and took a long razor-keen knife from its resting place on two pegs. Then he turned and stole silently from the ship. On the way back to the jungle, he was not molested by the glowing globes but this did not surprise him.

It was as he had expected...

Two manacles encircled the slim wrists of Jack Lane. These were attached to steel rings in the wall of the room where the beautiful blonde leopard paced its cage. Back and forth it padded, exhibiting the patience of all caged animals—looking, ever looking, for a means of escape that did not exist.

Jack Lane had sunk into a sort of mental stupor. In her case, nature acted differently from the way it had in the case of Johnny Mitchell. To guard her sanity, nature threw a blanket of uncomprehension over her mind; a blanket that deadened realization of her peril and of the horror about her. A dullness that caused her to accept hideousness as commonplace.

"Leo, Leo," she crooned. "I'm sorry—so dreadfully sorry." But was she, really? She wondered, feeling that her capacity to give pity had been somehow torn from her mind. "Leo, are you happy?"

The gorgeous blonde cat stopped and regarded Jack with malevolent eyes. Its tail snapped with the viciousness inherent in such animals and its cruel green eyes seemed riveted on Jack's throat.

At that moment, Jack noticed something that set her dulled mind working. The

padlock on the cage was open. This did not make for any less security so far as the beautiful blonde leopard was concerned. The hasp of the lock was long and the animal could never have tilted it far enough to slip it off and unlock the cage.

But human hands could.

Jack forced her numb mind to work. Leo did not belong in a cage. Whatever monstrous evil had been perpetrated upon her fair body, she did not belong caged like a beast. Because Leo was human and beasts had done this to her. She should have her freedom.

Jack turned her attention to the bands of steel around her wrists. They were not large, but her wrists were very slim. There was space between the metal and the flesh.

But enough? There had to be enough! She had to free Leo from the shame of an animal's cage. Jack took one of the manacles in one hand and tried to slip it down over the other. It moved easily as far as her thumb. There, stubborn resistance developed.

Jack set her white teeth and pulled hard. The pain was sharp but bearable. She moved the manacle lower and the resistance and pain in-

creased. She set her teeth into her lower lip and applied all her strength and the pain brought a sob from her throat.

It was not too late. She could still slide the manacle back and save herself from agony. The temptation was great. Even the greater because she knew she might get the steel band to a point on her hand where it would go in neither direction and she would have to stand there and endure interminable pain. But she made her decision, set her teeth hard, and pushed with every bit of her strength.

A stifled scream escaped her throat and there was blood on her red lips. The blonde leopard snarled at sound of her pain and crouched, its gleaming teeth bared.

Jack's slim body was bathed in sweat now and the agony of the constricting steel shot up her arm and seemed to drive its knife-like pain into her very heart. The world of Mainbocher's fiendish prison swam before her eyes.

Then the pain diminished to a dull ache and she looked down at her wrist. It was an angry red mass, but free. The perspiration engendered by her agony had been the lubricant over which the cruel steel slipped free.

With one arm loose, Jack

could just reach the door of the cage. "I've done it, Leo!" she sobbed. "Now I can help you. Poor Leo. You shall be free."

Jack lifted the padlock from the door and swung it open. "Come, darling. Come out of that awful cage."

The leopard emerged with a bound that carried it halfway across the room. Then it turned on padded feet and the cold green eyes settled upon the girl held helpless against the wall by a manacle on her left wrist.

The slim tail snapped. The green eyes were eloquent in their deadliness. The foolhardiness of Jack's act suddenly dawned upon her laboring mind. "No—no, Leo! You don't understand! Leo! No!"

The magnificent cat gathered its sleek muscles to spring . . .

Johnny Mitchell entered the jungle fringe and removed the space suit. He took a deep breath of Mainbocher's artificial atmosphere and grinned a wolfish, humorless grin. He glanced down and realized for the first time that he had neglected to put on his shoes when leaving the castle. This deepened his grin.

He raised his eyes and looked out through the thick jun-

gle, visualizing what awaited him there. Five brawny guards, well armed, beating the jungle, moving relentlessly to hunt him down.

Johnny considered. Could he help Jack with these demons at his back? Threading through the jungle and reaching the castle with his flank periled might put both of them into a trap from which they could never escape.

If Jack still lived, he could best serve her by clearing the forest as he moved. If she were already dead it made no difference. Then a mighty vengeance would be exacted. He tested the knife.

There was no fear in him—no doubt that he was capable of the task he set himself. He gripped the knife in his right fist and concentrated all his senses upon the quiet jungle.

The silence roared in his ears. Finally his miraculously sharpened hearing picked out the sound of heavy feet some distance away. Like a shadow Johnny Mitchell drifted from the glade in which he stood into the black depths of Mainbocher's jungle . . .

The guard was nervous and he knew not why. After all, what was there to be afraid of? A terrified reporter cringing under some bush waiting

to be taken? But what had happened to his fellow guard? The man still had not reappeared. The guard shrugged. It was as Mainbocher had said. Asleep somewhere in the jungle.

The guard scowled and straightened his shoulders. Then he whirled and something touched his back. A branch?

But no branch, this. Instead, a coldly grinning, half naked man with a gleaming knife in his right hand.

The guard snarled and brought his pistol around. But its wicked snout never leveled on the man's chest. Instead a powerful hand reached out and took the gun from him and threw it contemptuously into the jungle.

Then the hand transferred itself to his throat and he was looking into a pair of deadly eyes. "Scream, little one," the man said. "All little men scream on the threshold of death."

Little man? The guard outweighed Johnny Mitchell by at least thirty pounds but the comparison was that of a sinuous tiger to a lumbering cow.

The guard was bent backward, downward, with those awful eyes close above. He screamed, long and loud, and

Johnny Mitchell held him there, allowing him to scream until every inch of the jungle reverberated with the terror of it.

Then Johnny said, "That should be enough, I think," and killed the guard with one clean thrust of the knife.

After dropping the body to the ground, he moved to the edge of the glade and sat down to wait.

As he sat there, the jungle around him—which would have been a black conundrum to the old Johnny Mitchell—was a book to be read with new-found senses. He listened as the jungle talked to itself, whispered, complained, snarled, purred. The living jungle.

Suddenly he was aware of company. A faint, almost imperceptible sound which he interpreted immediately. A snake was slipping a sinuous way out of the undergrowth toward him. If it continued upon its course, it would pass not three feet from where he sat.

Johnny listened to the reptilian progress of nature's slinking child of the jungle slime. He realized with what fear he would have sprung up shrieking but a few short hours before and smiled to himself.

The snake came closer, as aware as was Johnny of a presence. For a few moments they measured each other there in the Stygian night. In complete silence, they sparred with that amazing sixth sense given by nature to its jungle children. Then the reptile withdrew, deciding this mysterious newcomer was a thing of more peril than profit.

Johnny's teeth gleamed in the faint light of the two moons as he again gloried in his rapport with new and elemental forces. Then a soft, instinctive snarl passed his lips as he heard the first faint sounds of the approaching guards.

The sounds increased quickly as the clumsy men made no effort to deaden their footsteps. As they approached, Johnny Mitchell stepped out to the edge of the glade so that he would be in sight when they broke into the open.

They came blundering in swiftly, their eyes picked Johnny out and they emitted a joint cry of triumph. Then Johnny vanished. There were two guards and they looked at each other in consternation.

Then, before either could comment upon the situation, a lethal shadow dropped from the tree branches above. It

landed just behind them. A glittering knife flashed. One of the guards screamed in agony and dropped to the ground in quick death.

The other turned to receive the knife thrust in his chest. He died with the image of two blazing eyes in his terrorized mind.

Johnny Mitchell wiped the blood from his knife on a wisp of jungle growth and wrote the two guards off his list of enemies.

He waited again. Twice more his knife flashed in deadly fury but after that no more of the guards appeared, so he set out for the castle of Professor Mainbocher.

Again he ascended the wall and entered the study of the evil genius but this time he did not tarry there. Moving out into the hallway, he investigated various exits, each leading him nowhere.

As he was returning to the study a form appeared in the hallway, coming stealthily through a doorway Johnny had yet to pass. The man's eyes turned in fright and fell upon Johnny. It was the guard whose life he had spared earlier in the jungle.

Instantly Johnny was upon him. This time, the reverted man wanted no sound as he

clamped his hand around the guard's throat.

He dragged the guard into Mainbocher's study while the craven's eyes appealed mutely for mercy. Johnny released his pressure slightly. "If you wish to live, tell me where I find the girl Mainbocher has captured. Quick!"

In terror, the guard motioned toward the doorway through which Mainbocher had taken Jack Lane a short time before.

"Lead the way," Johnny Mitchell growled.

The guard, completely cowed, was glad to do this. Johnny followed him down the new corridor until he stopped before another doorway. He pointed. "In there," he said.

Contemptuous of the guard and certain he had nothing to fear from the coward, Johnny pushed him aside and opened the door. Then he forgot the guard who, sensing an opportunity, began backing slowly away.

If he could just get clear of this human animal he could summon help. Evidently this would be possible and the guard brightened at thought of the torture he would exact from Johnny in payment for the terror and humiliation

caused him. He took another slow step backward—then another. The door was close.

Johnny had forgotten the guard, his mind filled with a more terrible and imperative danger. As he opened the door he was greeted by the sight of Jack Lane chained to the wall by one wrist. Crouching just ready to spring was a beautiful blonde leopard the like of which Johnny had never before seen. A thing of lethal beauty, its muscles bunched and even now uncoiling into action.

There was no time to think. There was time only for Johnny to hurl himself straight at the blonde death. With a screech of rage, the leopard turned, seeking to bring its deadly claws into play against the intruder.

Johnny's knife went down once, twice, but the hurried blows were not accurate.

The leopard screeched again as two crimson rips appeared in its tawny hide, and Jack Lane's frantic appeal was added to the din.

"No! No! Don't kill her! It would be murder! You must not commit murder!"

The warning disconcerted Johnny Mitchell a trifle just as he was prepared to bring his knife down in a surer arc. Enough to stay the blow a

split second and enable the cat to wriggle from beneath his body.

Confused, the feline somersaulted and came up gracefully on its four paws. Then, after a moment of indecision, it turned and streaked from the room.

Johnny arose and leaped to Jack Lane's side. But scarcely had he reached the girl when a shriek of agony and terror echoed and reechoed from the hall. Johnny ran to the door and even his reverted nerves were shaken by what he saw. The guard lying on the floor in the doorway between the inner hall and Mainbocher's study. The guard was dead, his throat ripped to shreds. Above the corpse crouched the terrible blonde leopard with great gouts of blood dripping from its jaws.

At sight of Johnny, the beast snarled and vanished into the study.

Johnny turned back and in a moment held the beautiful Jack Lane in his arms. "My darling—what has that devil done to you? What has happened?"

"Leo, my sister," the girl sobbed. "Mainbocher evolved her into a leopard—into the leopard you almost killed."

Johnny looked at his love

strangely, then with tenderness. He made no direct reply to her statement, but said, "I must get you out of here. We're completely vulnerable in this situation."

He studied the lock on her wrist and attempted to slip it off. When she cringed in pain he scowled and desisted. Then he looped the chain around his hands and braced one foot against the wall.

His muscles bulged and strained. His face grew dark with pounding blood and the heart in his chest leaped and pounded. But a rivet gave just as his lungs seemed about to burst. With renewed hope he increased the strain. There was a rasping sound. The rivet sprang from the wall and the chain that had bound his love hung loose in his hands.

He noted the outward manifestations of her condition but had no time to inquire into them, knowing the greatest peril lay in events of the moment. In the jungle depths he felt competent—master of any situation—but here in Mainbocher's dreadful castle, surrounded by the evil genius' science, things were different.

He realized that he feared Mainbocher, not as a man but as a scientist and now, with Jack Lane's fate in his hands,

his fears were doubly intense.

"We must return to the scout," he said, "and get back to the space station. We should not have come here alone." He glanced tenderly at the glassy-eyed girl and added, "I mean that I should not have allowed you to come. Now the important thing is to get you away."

"I'm afraid that will not be possible," a soft, purring voice commented.

Johnny Mitchell whirled. He had led Jack Lane down the shining corridor, over the body of the dead guard, and into Mainbocher's study. The voice that challenged him had been that of Mainbocher, who had stepped from a second doorway with a vicious-looking pistol in his hand.

Mainbocher regarded his guests quizzically. "My, my! You have raised havoc in my little oasis, haven't you? My one remaining guard seems to have come upon ill-fortune." Mainbocher sighed. "You certainly have been busy."

Johnny cursed himself for criminal carelessness in letting Mainbocher catch him unawares. Now he stood in helpless fury debating the odds.

He had no fear of the death Mainbocher held in his right fist. He gladly would have

died hurling himself at the evil scientist, if he could have been sure of eliminating him before Mainbocher's slug found his own heart.

But suppose he failed? Dead, he certainly could not protect Jack Lane from further suffering and degradation. Perhaps he could not do it alive either; but saving his life as a weapon to be hurled at Mainbocher when and if the right moment came, seemed the smarter of the two moves.

Johnny said, "What are you planning to do to—her?"

Mainbocher smiled. "She seems to be your whole interest, doesn't she?"

"Let's not discuss it."

"A sore point, eh? As a matter of fact I intend to save the lady for later experiments I have in mind. At the moment I'm more interested in you."

"I'll do anything you say if you will only put her in the scout and send her away." Johnny turned. "Look at her. She is certainly in no state to do you harm." His soul writhed at having to bargain with Mainbocher in this manner but there was no depth to which he would not degrade himself where Jack Lane's salvation was concerned.

Mainbocher laughed. "You are hardly in a position to exact payment for anything."

"I differ. Look at your own position. You are here alone. Your guards are dead—"

Mainbocher raised a hand in a contemptuous gesture. "That carrion? It can be purchased for so much a pound in any slum or waterfront in the universe. No, my friend, your cause is hopeless."

"Perhaps I can change that."

Mainbocher ignored the warning. He said, "You are a strange man. You came here as a reporter to get my story. I have a pretty good idea therefore, of the specimen you must have been."

"But now look at you—a reverted forest brute." Mainbocher paused to inspect Johnny Mitchell's physique. "A magnificent animal to be sure, but I want to know how such a change came about. It should advance my knowledge greatly. Therefore the girl will be imprisoned for future experiments. I will begin with you."

Once more Johnny Mitchell appeared to revert. An expression of fear stained his handsome features. He licked his lips nervously. "What—what form will these experiments take?"

"Relative to the girl?"

"No—relative to me."

"I want to go into your brain."

"Psychiatric analysis?"

"No, my friend. Through your skull with a saw—into your brain with a scalpel. And I regret that anesthesia will not be practical for my purposes."

"No! Wait! Listen to me! I can't stand anything like that!"

Mainbocher regarded his prisoner with contempt. "Could it be that the reverision was merely a pose?" He considered. "No—it could hardly have been that. But this sudden streak of cowardice intrigues me."

Johnny fell to his knees. "Please—please, I'll do anything, but I can't stand pain."

Mainbocher's eyes sparkled. "This will be doubly interesting. Move backward toward that door. I'll lock the girl in there and then we'll get to work. Yours must be a remarkable brain indeed. Move, I say!"

But Johnny Mitchell remained on his knees. His face was in his hands and he was crying. Mainbocher's contempt deepened. He circled the kneeling figure and forced Jack Lane toward the door in

question. He watched Johnny Mitchell warily but as he made no hostile move, the contempt in Mainbocher's face crept into his actions and at one point he actually turned his back on Johnny.

But after locking Jack Lane in the small room beyond the door, he turned and found that Johnny had not moved. He had only raised his head to witness the entrance of a newcomer into the room.

Lukas, Mainbocher's agent, who up to this moment had had very little to do with the swiftly moving events. He looked at the kneeling Johnny Mitchell and asked, "What have we here?"

"A craven coward, obviously," Mainbocher said.

Lukas was honestly surprised. "This is the superman who killed our entire garrison?"

"Amazing, isn't it?"

The sight of Johnny Mitchell on his knees had taken Lukas' mind off the thing he'd come to report. Grinning, he walked over and kicked Johnny cruelly in the face. Johnny went prostrate in a grovelling heap and Lukas repeated the punishment with vicious force into Johnny's ribs. Johnny sobbed and strove weakly to protect himself.

Lukas' mind went back to the matter of importance. "That blonde leopard of yours," he said. "It escaped the cage and the castle. I saw it prowling the jungle edge when I came in."

"This fool released it," Mainbocher said. "He or the girl."

"Whoever's responsible," Lukas said, "I'd have a care. The beast hates you. If you'd done the things to me that it has suffered at your hands I'd hate you too."

Mainbocher scowled. "Keep your tongue civil, Lukas."

"Listen—you don't scare me, so don't try those tactics. I'm no slobbering coward like that thing on the floor there. If I were you I'd remember that you're here because I made arrangements in places you can never go. You'd better remember that you're wanted on a dozen planets and certain death would be the verdict on at least ten of them."

Mainbocher's face darkened but he held his temper. "There is no use for us to quarrel," he said. "Our arrangement is profitable to us both. You are well paid for your part."

"I have no complaint in that regard. I just want you to remember I'm not one of your experiments."

Mainbocher smiled, seeking

to ingratiate himself with the one man who could damage him. "I wonder if you would do something for me? Take this gun and deliver our friend to the surgical room. I have a small matter to attend to, then I'll meet you there. You can observe the operation if you wish. It should be interesting."

"I'd rather perform my own operation — on the girl," Lukas smiled.

"Perhaps that can be arranged—later."

Lukas took the gun from Mainbocher and as the latter left the room, he crossed over and kicked Johnny. "Get to your feet. And don't give me any trouble or you won't live to endure the surgery."

Johnny did as ordered and moved forward with his shoulders drooped and his head low. Lukas followed negligently. "Through that door," he said.

Had he looked closely he would have seen the look in Johnny's eyes; a look that did not match the cringing attitude he wore.

But Lukas allowed his contempt to do him ill favor in that he extended it into carelessness as they moved down another shining, aluminum-walled passage.

So negligent, in fact, that Johnny struck not four steps from the door. He whirled like a steel spring on a pivot and fear flashed through Lukas' mind as he saw the pistol jerked from his hand and tossed aside. Panic came also as he realized in a mind-flash far faster than physical reaction, that he was no match for this play-acting prisoner.

He backed hastily away. His throat worked at the hatred he saw in Johnny Mitchell's eyes. He said, "Wait—wait! We can make a deal. We can help each other!"

Johnny advanced with his hands tensed into claws, his arms hanging loosely at his sides. His shoulders hung forward as did those of his primordial ancestors when closing on terrified prey.

In desperation, Lukas struck up at the unprotected face before him. His fist found flesh and left a red bruise on Johnny's jaw. But he could have been smashing at iron.

Johnny's own hand doubled into a fist. It lashed out like a piston, smashing the nose under Lukas' terrified eyes. Blood spurted in a crimson stream down the man's face.

Lukas squalled in pain and pawed out blindly but his fate was sealed. Johnny's hands reached out to take him by the

throat in the primitive elemental fashion—the way men killed their foes in the days before weapons were invented.

Soon Johnny dropped the lifeless form to the floor.

Again the feeling of power swept him as his cunning paid off. He went again into the study, Lukas' gun now in his belt.

He was scarcely halfway to the door behind which Jack Lane was imprisoned when Professor Mainbocher entered from the great hallway. Mainbocher was wearing a self-satisfied expression. He was congratulating himself upon how well things had gone.

But the expression dropped from his face like a mask when he saw the triumphant Johnny Mitchell waiting for him. Mainbocher took two backward steps. With glowing, malevolent eyes, Johnny took the pistol from his belt and hurled it in a far corner of the room. Then he advanced with only his two hands for weapons.

Mainbocher, however, had no stomach for this meeting. He backed from the room and as Johnny sprang, Mainbocher gave a scream of fright and fled down the great hall and out into the protecting darkness of the jungle.

Johnny paused. Much as he wanted to reach Mainbocher, the door of Jack Lane's prison was a greater magnet. He sprang across the room and unlocked it and again the girl fell into his arms.

He thought he felt some restraint in her manner and drew her close. "My darling," he said. "You must understand that it was the only way I could save you. If they continued to fear me they would have not relaxed for a moment until I was helpless in chains. But through the ruse of cowardice I was able to make them careless—careless for one little moment—and that was enough."

Jack Lane, sated with horror, looked at him dully and he wondered if she had even heard his words. She said, "He took my sister—brought her to this awful place and turned her into—"

Johnny shook her sharply. "No, Jack! He did no such thing. Such a feat would be impossible. The leopard in that cage was a real one that Mainbocher used for his devilish experiments, just as he used human beings."

Her beautiful eyes were cloudy. "But—"

"I could never believe Mainbocher was capable of the things rumor gave him credit

for. But I was convinced myself because of some of the things I saw—or thought I saw. I got an inkling of his true process from some of his writings in his desk."

"What did you see?"

"First there were some brightly colored globes I saw on the way from the ship."

"I saw them too."

"They attacked me and tore my space suit. Then I came upon a grove of trees that were female bodies in various stages of evolution."

"I fled these horrors and then went back after I read Mainbocher's notes."

"And the globes? They were still there?"

"No. They were only illusions. The colored globes did not exist except as illusions planted in my mind by Mainbocher—planted on some master scale even before he saw me. In that respect he is a genius."

"Only illusions?" Jack Lane asked, her numbed mind trying to grasp what Johnny was saying.

"Yes, my darling. When I got back I found the space suit complete and intact. No tears or rips. And the grove of women was really a grove of brambled trees. When I thought terrible arms went around me it was only sinuous

branches into which I had stepped."

"A master illusionist," Jack marveled.

"Yes. He planted the idea in your mind that your sister had been turned into a leopard in order to drive you mad. His objective is insanity in all he gets into his power because he wants to work with insane minds. I came upon one of these poor unfortunates out in the jungle. There are probably more."

Fright flashed in Jack's eyes. "Leo—"

He held her close. "Darling, I think it must be faced. Possibly she is somewhere in this awful castle, but I feel and hope she is dead. It would be better that way."

He spoke gently, but Jack shuddered and pressed her face against his chest. "I came to avenge her. I thought I was so brave—that my courage would carry me through."

He kissed her and held her close. "I will try to have courage enough for both of us, my darling."

Jack shuddered again. "Take me away from this awful place. Take me far away."

"I think we should go back to the space station and report what we found here. On

the basis of a legitimate complaint, the authorities will move in."

Johnny had another reason for wanting to leave. He did not want Jack present when a search of the castle was made. Her mind had been buffeted enough without the added horror of seeing what had no doubt happened to her sister. Johnny realized he had to get her away and make her forget this awful experience as nearly as it would be possible to do so.

But one more bit of drama was to be enacted before they regained the scout ship. This was introduced by a fearful shriek as they walked from the castle.

The sound chilled the blood of both and they turned to see Mainbocher, a picture of insane terror, backed into a corner where two of the courtyard walls met.

Creeping toward him on its belly, was the sleek blonde cat upon which he had wreaked such suffering that the animal's mind was a red haze as the baleful green eyes contemplated the tormentor.

"Save me!" Mainbocher

shrieked. "The beast will kill me! A brain such as mine should not be allowed to perish. Save me and all I have is yours."

Johnny Mitchell drew Jack Lane close to him. "There is nothing we can do," he said. "I threw away the gun and I cannot fight a leopard with my bare hands."

At that moment, the blonde cat leaped and its savage roar drowned Mainbocher's last, terrified cry.

"What an awful way to die," Jack Lane whispered. "I can't help feeling sorry for him."

"I would have saved him had I been able," Johnny said. "But perhaps there is justice in this. Mainbocher lived by the law of the jungle and the law of the jungle condemned and executed him."

"Let's hurry," Jack Lane said. "I long for the sight of clean dark space again."

So they hurried through the jungle toward the scout, and the two moons looked down on the courtyard in which lay the torn and bloody result of age-old cruelty come face to face with age-old vengeance.

THE END

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LIBEL

By HOWARD RUSH

Libel, says Mr. Webster, who knows just about everything, is "any statement published without just cause, tending to expose another to public hatred, contempt or ridicule."

Clear enough—as far as it goes. What George Grumley and Perry Dreamurge want to know is this: What verdict would the courts arrive at if you made such a statement about a girl hundreds of years before she was born?

THIS morning George Grumley found it good to be editor of *Fabulous Science Magazine*.

The sun shone brightly through the green-tinted windows of his penthouse editorial suite. He had no hangover. His ulcer was quiet. His wife had been genial at breakfast. Truly, it was a good day to be alive.

The day brightened still more as he studied the new circulation figure, now only a few hundred thousand below the Satevepost. It was an auspicious hour for editorial conference with the man whose pen had produced clev-

er yarns and much of that fat circulation.

Perry Dreamurge was on his way to the office now. Grumley had left orders not to be otherwise disturbed until lunch, hoping they could find a good new novelette in a bottle of Scotch. George leaned back to contemplate the golden flight path of FSM into future years.

That was when his unexpected caller arrived.

The caller was a young woman — quite beautiful. Grumley did not see her come in.

"Dammit, Mabel!" he bel-



She wanted Justice, all right—but not the old-fashioned kind! 53

lowed into the intercom. "I told you no appointments."

"Yes, Mr. Grumley." Mabel's voice was fluttery. "I've cancelled them all. Joe Broom called—"

"Hell with Broom," Grumley shouted. "What is this woman doing in here?"

"I wouldn't know, Mr. Grumley," Mabel sniffed indignantly. "She didn't come through the office."

This woman settled in the foam-rubber chair reserved for Perry Dreamurge and waved a sophisticated ankle. There were knee dimples, too.

Her sheath gown of sparkling green fitted like the skin of an avocado. Magnificent form, *free form* was Grumley's absurd but applicable thought. Her softly-waved hair was the color of butter and honey. Her eyes were gray and penetrating. Finally, Grumley saw she was smiling.

He ran his tongue over dry lips.

"If—ah—you have a manuscript to submit, please leave it with my secretary. I'll be happy to give you an—ah—appointment later."

"I'm Polly Denise, Space Siren," she said calmly. Her tone suggested the taste of a cool, juicy watermelon.

"You're what!"

"My card," she said demurely.

He scanned it hastily and did a doubletake. The script lettering blinked on and off like a neon sign. He flipped it over to find a source of power. No batteries.

The card said:

*Pauline Denise
Attorney at Law
21st Century Bldg.*

While he digested this message, Miss Denise rifled through recent copies of FSM on Grumley's desk. George uttered a small strangling sound.

"Here it is!" Polly cried triumphantly. "This is the very one."

"What?"

"The article. Here, this long one in the front by Perry Dreamurge. See?" She cracked the book and held it in front of Grumley's nose.

"Of course, I see," he growled. "That's last month's issue. Good story, too—if I may say so."

"You're familiar with its contents then?"

"Naturally."

"It was published with your sanction and approval?"

George nodded.

"I'm filing suit you know," Polly said airily. "I just want-

ed to be sure you knew what you were doing."

Grumley sizzled like a seltzer bottle. "Now see here, young woman," he sputtered, "this silly gag has gone far enough. I have an editorial conference in ten minutes. So please leave. Later, perhaps, we can discuss this gimmick of yours over a drink, or dinner—"

Polly's eyes shifted from limpid to metallic gray.

"I'm afraid you don't understand," she explained patiently. "I have just filed suit demanding \$2,000,000 damages for libelous material printed in this issue of your magazine. Mr. Dreamurge centers this article around Polly Denise, Space Siren. You see?"

"No, I don't see—"

Miss Denise thumbed impatiently through the magazine.

"Here. This passage. Read it."

Grumley did so.

"That young lady's behavior with Starburn Barton is somewhat scandalous, don't you agree?" Polly asked.

"Yes, but what—"

"I'm Polly Denise. Unfortunately, I once voyaged with Mr. Barton to Alpha Centaurus, as you so accurately state in this magazine. But I neith-

er accepted nor enjoyed Barton's crude attentions. That's where this article goes wrong and my reputation was damaged beyond repair. Do you see now?"

"You're nuts," Grumley barked. "Dreamurge imagined this story happening in 2037 A.D. That's 75 years from now."

"Exactly," Polly said quietly. "That's the year I ran for senator. I was defeated, thanks to your little book. My unworthy opponent found an old copy of your filthy magazine in an attic somewhere and started a successful whispering campaign."

She sighed.

"I really did want to be senator."

Grumley stood up and walked warily around Miss Polly Denise.

"Get out!" he whispered, licking a fleck of foam from the corner of his mouth. "Even if it's a joke, a \$2,000,000 libel suit isn't funny."

"It's no joke," Polly smiled thinly. "If you think so, call the clerk of court—Division 18."

Grumley stared at her for a moment, then he thumbed hastily through the phone book. He dialed the number,

asked the question, and received an answer.

"See?" she said. Grumley nodded dumbly.

The office door opened. Perry Dreamurge walked in.

He was in time to see Miss Denise shift gracefully to ectoplasm, and then vanish completely.

"What was that?"

"That," Grumley said wearily, "was a young woman who is suing us for libel—you and me—from 75 years in the future."

"How did she get here?" Perry asked excitedly, his story sense alert.

"How should I know?" Grumley barked. "Time travel I suppose. That's how they do it in all your yarns, isn't it?"

He briefed his favorite writer on the interview with Miss Denise. When he was done, they chuckled uneasily, like small boys whistling through a dark cemetery. Surely it was a promotion scheme which they would hear about from BBD&O in the morning.

"It'll never get to court," Grumley gurgled happily.

He was wrong.

Apparently Polly Denise, Space Siren, interviewed Judge Hanrahan personally in Division 18. That worthy jur-

ist promptly reshuffled his docket to schedule a hearing on the libel suit the following week. It was not told what manner of persuasion Miss Denise had used.

Grumley fought off a minor heart attack and consulted the law firm of Brockwell and Tompkins.

Appraised of the facts, Brockwell jeered at the obvious fraud and Tompkins prepared a brief. They filed a motion for dismissal.

On the way to court, Grumley and Perry Dreamurge stopped for coffee. George's hands were trembling, so he spilled most of his in the saucer. Perry wore a rapt expression.

"It's wonderful," he whispered. "Imagine, someone actually coming back through a time machine from 75 years in the future. She could give me enough information for a hundred good stories."

"May I remind you," George said acidly, "if she wins this lawsuit, there won't be a magazine left to print your precious stories? And you're just as liable as we are, don't forget that."

"Me? I don't have any money," Perry registered surprise. "You only pay me two cents a word."

Grumley growled and pushed his coffee cup aside.

"Come on. Let's get it over with."

When they arrived in the courtroom, Polly was already there. She had changed from her sparkling green sheath to a pearl-gray suit, soft and demure. She sat at the attorneys' table, but in such a position that Judge Hanrahan could not miss any pertinent anatomical features when he took the bench.

There was much muttering, polite greetings and scraping of chairs as Grumley, Perry Dreamurge and Attorney Brockwell took their places at the table. They rose at the bailiff's signal and sat down again as Judge Hanrahan settled himself in his robes. The judge peered judicially over rimless glasses and read the case title to the court reporter.

He faltered once when Miss Denise crossed her knees.

Attorney Brockwell addressed the court.

"Your honor," he cleared his throat, "we are surprised that this case actually has come to trial since it is an obvious fraud. Due to the haste with which the court set our motion down for hearing, we have not been able to find actual proof that Miss Pauline

Denise filed this suit for purposes of cheap publicity, but we believe this to be true. Obviously, this case is groundless.

"Aside from that, Miss Denise claims to have arrived here by way of a device which permits her to travel—if that term is correct—in time. Such a device is not now known on earth. Such a device, we believe is impossible to conceive and construct. Certainly such a device is not recognized in any court of law in the world at this moment. Therefore, the defendant claims that Miss Denise, legally speaking, does not exist."

Judge Hanrahan surveyed Polly seriously for several moments. Miss Denise smiled. The judge smiled.

Perry Dreamurge grinned vacuously as he, too, surveyed Miss Denise.

"Stop drooling," Grumley muttered. The judge cleared his throat and turned a stern gaze upon Brockwell.

"Counsellor is presumptuous," he said. "The court takes judicial notice that Miss Denise exists, most substantially."

"The old goat," Brockwell whispered to Grumley. "He's a sucker for a well-turned leg."

"Proceed Mr. Brockwell!"

"Your honor," Polly interrupted and stepped languorously to the bench. "Since there are many factors in this case not yet familiar in 1962 jurisprudence, I should like at this point to establish identity and present preliminary proof that my professional and personal reputations have suffered deeply as a result of the magazine article designated in the particulars."

Hanrahan nodded approval.

At that moment a plastic briefcase appeared on the table. It had not been there before. Brockwell's chair screeched as he scooted back in surprise. Grumley grunted. Perry grinned with admiration. Time travel, no doubt about it.

Polly fumbled helplessly with the briefcase lock and flipped her hand in a feminine gesture of apology.

"Pardon me, your honor, these time clinic people are so unreliable."

She pressed a diamond stud on a bracelet around her wrist—and disappeared.

Brockwell leaped to his feet.

"Don't shout," the judge snapped. "What do you expect me to do about it?"

Before anything could be done, Polly was back.

"The key," she said, holding up what, obviously, was the key to the briefcase. She hauled out a sheaf of papers.

"First, my birth certificate. I was born in 2013 in San Francisco."

"Don't you mean, will be born?" the judge interjected in a puzzled voice.

"No, your honor. That is part of my basic premise in this lawsuit. Time transmission can alter nothing that already has occurred."

Hanrahan shook his head in bewilderment.

"My diploma." Polly placed the paper in front of Brockwell. "You will note I received my law degree from Far West University in 2035. In the same year I was licensed as a hostess on interstellar rockets, a highly-skilled position which requires legal knowledge. It was in 2036 that I made the ill-fated flight with Starburn Barton, a flight accurately chronicled by Mr. Dreamurge, except for certain scandalous and damaging details. The Space Siren nickname was good clean fun, until Mr. Dreamurge set his pen to it.

"In any case," she turned a dazzling smile upon Brockwell. "I hope I have convinced attorney for the defense that I do, indeed, exist. Official af-

fidavits are attached to each document."

Brockwell examined the papers, grunted his disapproval, but did not object.

"Now, with the court's permission I will prove validity of the time transmission process."

Hanrahan nodded. Polly pressed another diamond stud at her wrist. A movie projector of advanced design appeared on the table with a roll of film and a screen.

Polly had trouble with the screen tripod. Perry jumped to help her, but was hauled back by Grumley. Finally, the judge stepped down from the bench to assist. Polly smiled graciously.

The bailiff drew the shades and the movie began in full 3-D color.

It opened in a large room of chrome and tile narrowing to a closeup upon a complex mass of wiring and machinery covering one wall of the room. Several white-coated attendants moved busily about.

"This is the time transmission device, modified of course since its invention in 2004 by Albert Crockley," Polly interpreted. "In its early stages, the machine was successful only in losing several brave men who tried its services.

"Later, when it was proven a success, there was much frivolous traveling to the past and future. This was curbed dramatically when a famous scientist of our century was murdered in Medieval England.

"Since then the time transmission process, and the only known device, have been strictly controlled by the government. A special permit is needed to travel into the past or future, and only one or two applicants who can prove urgent need are granted permits in a year.

"One of the first to gain such a permit was Professor Edwin Moskowitz, an archeologist of some standing. Here we see him in ancient Egypt. That's Moskowitz in Cairo sitting beside a palace dignitary."

It was Egypt all right. Perry was aware that this part of a film probably could be faked, but the scene was fascinating. Moskowitz was watching an exotic dance. The raven-haired performer was executing intricate muscular movements, uninhibited by garments of consequence.

"I object," Brockwell yelled. "incompetent and irrelevant."

"Withhold ruling," Hanrahan snapped.

In the semi-darkness it could be seen he was giving the film close judicial attention. The dancer completed her performance while Perry's heart thudded in cadence with the Egyptian drums.

The scene returned to the time clinic.

"This is perhaps more relevant," Miss Denise continued. "Please note the view screen which is part of the time transmission apparatus."

As they watched, the screen moved forward in the picture.

"This, I believe Mr. Grumley will verify, is how his office appeared during my first and only visit there. Watch closely and you will be able to read your own lips during our conversation."

Grumley made a gurgling noise but admitted finally that he could do so.

The film ended. The lights came on.

"I'll rule on your objection now, Brockwell," the judge said. "Overruled."

Beads of perspiration moistened Grumley's forehead.

"Don't worry," Brockwell whispered, "she hasn't proven a thing yet." He sounded less confident than before.

"Now, your honor," Polly said, "I offer into evidence, marked exhibit A, the July 1962 edition of *Fabulous*

Science Magazine. This copy is 75 years old."

Grumley and Perry Dream-urge both were fascinated with this. The ancient pulp-paper magazine was dog-eared. Some of its pages were torn and brown with age, but inside, where light had not struck, the paper was white and the printing black and clear.

George and Perry studied it intently. Brockwell was forced to peer over their shoulders.

"Marvelous!" Perry murmured. "Isn't it wonderful my work lived so long?"

Grumley ripped the book from Perry's hands and leaped to his feet.

"I've got it!" he shouted.

The judge rapped his gavel sharply.

"Order, Mr. Grumley! Or I'll hold you in contempt of court."

"But your honor, please . . . this is the answer to the entire suit. Let me read it, here at the bottom of the table of contents. It says 'Characters in this magazine entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead.'"

Grumley sat down, triumphant.

"I object, your honor," Polly said easily. "I believe it has

been held that such phrasing excuses a publisher only where a bonafide effort has been made to learn if such persons actually exist or will exist. I maintain that ignorance is no excuse to write of a person scandalously, and in minute detail as was done here, unless truth can be shown. I will present witnesses to prove that all of this article by Mr. Dreamurge is true *except* for the passages which destroyed my reputation."

"Your objection is well taken, Miss Denise," the judge said graciously. "I uphold it."

Brockwell rose wearily to his feet.

"Your honor, this absurd procedure is all very well, but my clients and I have other important things to do. Clearly the statute of limitations applies here and is sufficient cause for dismissal. That magazine was published in July, 1962. Miss Denise, by her own admission, was not born until 2013 A.D."

Hanrahan pondered. Polly reached into her briefcase again.

"If your honor please," she said, "I have here a brief of seven cases in which it was held that libel occurs *not* upon publication of a book or periodical, but rather during

the hour or day in which the damage occurs."

She gave the brief to the judge and a copy to Brockwell. The defense attorney thumbed angrily through a half-dozen law books. The judge made a similar examination. At the end of fifteen minutes he peered over his spectacles at the defense attorney.

"She's right, isn't she," he said.

Brockwell slumped in his chair and nodded wearily.

"May I proceed to the calling of witnesses?" Polly asked.

"Please, your honor," Brockwell said, "before we begin that process—which I'm sure entails dredging more ghouls and ghosts out of the future—may I present one more point?"

Hanrahan granted permission grudgingly.

"Since Miss Denise has come to us from the future and was not born until 2013, I believe it is true that at this moment she is not a resident of this city or state."

The judge nodded.

"Nor is she a citizen of the United States—or of any nation of the world." Brockwell warmed to his task, gaining confidence as he progressed. "I submit, therefore, that this

court does not hold jurisdiction of this case."

Hanrahan glared.

"Since when, Mr. Brockwell, is it necessary for a plaintiff to be a citizen to bring suit? Aliens are granted full rights in the courts of this nation."

"But your honor," Brockwell boomed, "the statutes and the common law pertain only to *persons living on this world*. There is no legal precedent which allows the due process of law to someone who is not a resident of the *Solar System or of the universe*."

The argument was keen. Polly was shaken. Judge Hanrahan, not given to a poker face, registered similar though controlled dismay.

"This," he cleared his throat painfully, "is a major point. I must take it under advisement."

He retired to his quarters.

Polly left the courtroom. Perry hurried after and caught up with her in the hallway.

"Miss Denise—" he blushed, "—pardon me. But even though we seem to be enemies at the moment, I must tell you I admire you very much. However this case comes out, could I possibly—somewhere

—talk to you about the future, before you return there?"

Polly gave him her most lovely smile.

"I think that may be possible," she said softly.

Grumley hurried out of the courtroom.

"Here, here!" he growled. "Let's have no fraternizing."

Minutes later the bailiff called them back. The judge was ready to rule. He polished his spectacles carefully before speaking.

"In view of the fact that Miss Denise has proven she came here from the future," Hanrahan said, "the point raised by counsel is one that may well shake the foundations of judicial procedure. Others might well follow her example.

"It is a point on which I feel incompetent to rule. A higher court decision is needed. So. . . .

He rapped his gavel.

". . . case dismissed."

Perry searched anxiously for the effect on Polly. Oddly enough she did not seem crushed.

"So that's how it happened," she murmured, a half smile turning the corners of her lovely mouth.

"It is not in my province to urge you to appeal to a higher

court," Judge Hanrahan said, "but you have a complete right to do so, Miss Denise." He held her hand possessively.

"Thank you, your honor," she said demurely, "I don't believe it would actually be worthwhile."

Grumley drew a long breath and felt his heart return to normal. Brockwell squared his shoulders and stuffed papers briskly into his briefcase. With some satisfaction he started mentally computing his fee.

Grumley wasn't even unhappy when he saw Perry escort Miss Denise to lunch.

It appeared FSM had a new lease on life.

A year later George Grumley sat in his penthouse editorial suite, reading the latest story to come from the pen of Perry Dreamurge.

One moment he was alone.

The next moment Polly was sitting in the foam rubber chair, swinging a nyloned ankle nonchalantly.

"Oh lord!" Grumley nearly strangled on his cigar. "What now?"

"I'm filing suit again," Polly said.

"The same one?"

"The same one."

"In the same court?"

"Yes."

Grumley uttered a muffled Bronx cheer.

"I admire your persistence," he said confidently, "but an appeal would have made more sense. You're no more a citizen of the universe now than you were a year ago."

"On the contrary," Polly smiled, "I have a nice little apartment in Greenwich Village. And five witnesses to prove I've lived there for a year."

George groaned. Possibly her case could be defeated on other grounds, but his heart was not fit for a long, suspenseful trial.

"You see," Polly said pleasantly, "the old records showed that my first suit was dismissed, but part of the transcript was missing so I didn't know why. That business about not being a citizen of the universe was quite clever of Brockwell. However, I feel sure my second lawsuit will succeed."

"From the—" Grumley's whisper faltered, "—from the old records, you know this?"

"Yes," Polly said brightly. "They show the court awarded only half the \$2,000,000 I asked, but that, apparently, was sufficient to bankrupt your magazine. It folded the following year."

(Concluded on page 97)

LADIES IN WAITING

By DARIUS JOHN GRANGER

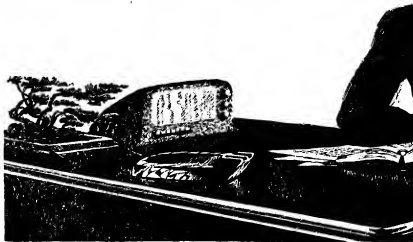
Of all planets crowding the Milky Way, the one known as LaSalle's was the wackiest. Life there was much the same as on Earth; there you found cities and plains, forests and mountains. And there you found Man and Woman—except that the men were men and the women trained to kill them on sight!

NERVOUS?" Talbot asked. Hazlett grinned and nodded his head. "I guess so." He stood with his eyes glued to the view port, watching the small green disk of LaSalle's Planet growing perceptibly.

"It's always that way the first few times," Talbot reflected. "After a while,

though, it's like any other job. What are you shaking your head about? You don't believe me? Hell, I've been on this kick twenty-two years. I ought to know. Got any pet ideas about the population of LaSalle's Planet?"

"No," Hazlett admitted. "How could I? Earth's been





The cord tightened about Talbot's neck, choking off his startled cry.

out of touch with the place for almost two hundred years. Maybe they're all dead."

"Maybe," the older man said. "If they're not, you can figure something funny's going on. Otherwise they wouldn't have broken contact with Earth. Well, that's what Colonization Central sent us to find out. How's the robot pilot coming?"

Hazlett checked the dials alongside the viewport. "Wants help," he grunted, and sat down at the controls. "Better hammock yourself, Tally."

Talbot secured his short, stocky body in a crash hammock while Hazlett fastened the pilot chair safety straps. Talbot said, "I don't feel the braking rockets."

"That's because stasis is on."

"It is not. I shut stasis off a couple of minutes ago. I like the feel of landing."

Hazlett checked the control board. "The braking rockets ought to be firing," he said.

Alarm edged into Talbot's voice. "They're not. How far up are we?"

"About five hundred miles."

"Falling speed?"

"Two m.p.s. LaSalle's speed of escape."

"Try the braking rockets again."

"I did," Hazlett said. "I did!"

"All right, take it easy." Talbot climbed from the crash hammock and stood alongside the pilot chair. "Feed line snapped?" he suggested.

"Maybe. We don't have time to find out. We're going to meteor, Tally."

"I doubt it. LaSalle's a small planet. Atmosphere won't be like soup till down near the surface."

White-faced, Hazlett stared at the viewport. LaSalle's Planet was a green and white ball swelling up at them, its bloated surface mottled with an ugly brown. It filled almost the entire viewport now. Soon its rim swelled beyond the edges of the viewport and what Hazlett saw was a rectangular physical relief map, the valleys like green-slashed scars, the mountains naked and up-thrusting.

"Three hundred miles," he said.

"We have a little margin," Talbot whispered fiercely. "Try the brakes again."

"I'm trying."

"Then flip her around and use the aft rockets. It's our only chance. Maybe we won't meteor, but that won't matter if we hit at a mile a second."

Grimly, Hazlett began to

bring the spaceship around by playing the aft starboard rockets only. He felt the gravitational pressure build up agonizingly in every muscle of his body. *My first expedition*, he thought bleakly, *and probably my last*. The pressure shifted, thrust him suddenly from the pilot chair. He went head over heels and landed in a heap against the wall. He saw Talbot, more experienced, clinging stubbornly to a stanchion.

"I got all I can do to hold on!" Talbot cried. "I can't reach the controls, kid. Why the hell didn't you keep the straps secured?"

Instead of answering, Hazlett inched his way across the floor toward the pilot chair. The gravitational pressure gripped every atom of his being. It would be so easy to give up, to surrender to the inexorable, to lie back and let the blackness engulf him . . .

"... aboy! You're close now. Come on, kid."

It was like climbing up the sheer face of a cliff. He could almost reach out and touch the pilot chair now, but it seemed as if an infinite chasm of weariness and pain separated him from it. He could feel the blood pulsing in his head, could feel the wet warmth of it trickling from

his nostrils. He pulled himself slowly up the base of the chair, slowly, slowly. When his head reached the level of the seat, he could see the viewport. A green valley rushed at them, threatening to engulf them in seconds. It swung away as the spaceship continued to arc, revealing stark, ugly mountains speeding toward them, rearing up through sparse white cottony clouds.

Hazlett slumped forward, thrusting his right forearm at the aft rocket control. "A hundred and eighty degrees," he managed to say. "Full rockets, Tally."

He turned around slowly. His neck felt like a column of granite frozen in a glacier. Talbot had lost his grip on the stanchion. He had slipped to the floor. He tried to raise his hand in a V for victory sign, but couldn't get it off the deck.

The small spaceship shuddered. Hazlett remembered to strap himself in this time. At the last moment he shut his eyes, but a blinding flash streaked across his vision, searing the blackness for a brief instant. Then the blackness returned and enveloped him.

Eleanor Stedman heard the

faint plopping sound of the pneumatic mail tube and beat her room-mate to the mail slot by one agile stride. "It's for me," she said.

Jane Harris smiled. "If it's what you think it is, you can have it."

Eleanor opened the letter quickly. Her fingers were surprisingly steady as she withdrew the single black sheet of paper. She looked at it and nodded her head. "From Government," she said.

"Your Death Notice?"

"Yes, my Death Notice. Listen."

"I know how they're worded."

Nevertheless, Eleanor read the tersely worded announcement: "Miss Eleanor Stedman, Female City. You are hereby notified that the Department of Birth Records has placed your certificate in suspense file for a period of thirty days since you have today reached your twenty-first birthday, according to our records. If this is incorrect, contact us immediately. If it is not, you know the obligation with which you are faced. You have thirty days in which to kill a man. If, at the end of that time, you have not succeeded, you will surrender yourself to Extinction Center under the provisions

of the law. Proof of the execution of your mission must be satisfactorily furnished in the event of alleged success. Good luck."

Eleanor crumpled the sheet of black paper into a ball and dropped it in the disposal shoot. She took two lithe strides across the small room, which was exactly seven feet long and seven feet wide. She sat down on the edge of the lower bunk and stared at the floor without speaking. The small room contained the two bunks and a compact furniture unit, the food chute, the disposal chute, a tiny closet and a wall mirror.

"It's not as bad as all that," Jane Harris said.

"I'll be all right."

"It's always like that the first time. I'm twenty-five, Eleanor. I've already killed five men."

"Yes," Eleanor said. She got up restlessly and stood before the mirror. She was a tall blonde girl with a very pretty face and a provocative figure—high-breasted, narrow-waisted, long and graceful of limb—which would be a prime target for the wolf packs of misogynistic men who sometimes roved the streets of Female City in search of victims at night.

"Just take it easy. It's their

life or yours. Look at it that way."

"It used to be you could capture a man and offer him up for extinction in your place."

"Not any more. Not since my twenty-first birthday. There was too much clerical work that had to be done. Can you use a knife, Eleanor?"

"I've had some training at school."

"I like a knife myself, but it's up to you. There's a strangling cord fad these days."

"They gave us a lot of training in the strangling cord."

"Then what are you worrying about?"

"I don't know, I guess. I'm confused. I need time to think."

"Maybe you better not go looking in Male City tonight."

"I wasn't planning to."

"You know, a pretty girl like you doesn't even have to go into Male City. You could probably get your victim right here in the safety of our own city."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, now that you have to wear your coming-of-age clothing, it shows you're fair game. Men will be out to get you. All you have to do is turn the tables on them."

"All, she says."

"Well, it's safer than going over there," Jane Harris said. She was a short, heavy-set girl with thick, unpretty features.

Instead of answering, Eleanor went to the closet and got out her deep green coming-of-age clothing. She stripped and replaced her juvenile apparel with the tight-fitting green jumper. There were several cleverly-concealed trick pockets for knives and other lethal weapons. There was a loop alongside her flat waist where a strangling cord could be hung.

"You look prettier than ever," Jane Harris said. "Just wander around the streets at night, Eleanor. You'll find a victim."

"No," Eleanor said. "I'm all mixed up. I still have thirty days. I—"

"What are you going to do?"

"Go outside the City for a while."

"You mean, go on to Male City?"

"No. Outside. Outside the Dome."

"But it's so hot out there, so wild and—Eleanor, listen to me. I don't want to act motherly, but—"

"Do, and I'll report you."

"But you can't just throw your life away like that."

"I won't be throwing my life away. Didn't the City ever get on your nerves?"

"No. Why should it?"

"You're lucky," Eleanor said. She went to the door, which slid into the wall because there would not have been room for it to open into the tiny chamber and the corridor outside was too narrow.

"Wait a minute," Jane said. "There's the mail chute again."

Jane opened the chute and said, "It's addressed to both of us, but not by name. One of those Occupant-room letters, you know."

"Read it."

"Occupant, Room 1104, South Building Fifteen, Female City, LaSalle. You are hereby notified that the hunting laws have been changed for the balance of this season. Capture of a male and delivery of him to Extinction Center will once again be an adequate fulfillment of your duty as women. Signed, Maria Logan, Hunting Committee."

"That's better," Eleanor said. "That's much better. I think I could do that."

"You're a lucky girl, Eleanor. Then you're not going Outside? You're staying in the City?"

"No. I'm still going outside. I want time to think."

"I think you're crazy, but go ahead."

Eleanor shrugged and slid the door shut behind her. The corridor was crowded with women who had not been lucky enough to draw room assignments in the last semi-annual lottery. Female City, with a population of fifty million in an area of seventy-five square miles, could supply only half its citizens with room assignments. Eleanor knew that the same condition prevailed in Male City across the river. A score of women looked at Eleanor enviously as she walked down the corridor. She could hear them muttering behind her as she reached the street, but she had grown accustomed to this and paid it little attention.

The street too was packed with women. They roved the sidewalks restlessly in little bands. They stood on crowded corners and talked. They sat on stoops in front of the ranks of apartment buildings. They prowled down near the waterfront singly or in groups of two or three, hurling taunts at the crowds of men across the river. There was hardly a square foot of space on which someone was not standing.

When Eleanor reached the river, a dozen young males were being driven across the bridge. This meant, she knew, that they had reached their fourteenth birthdays and must now live in Male City for the rest of their lives. She envied them suddenly: they still had seven years before they had to enter the grim battle for survival. By the time they did, they would be thoroughly indoctrinated woman-haters. And yet, Eleanor thought, the fact that there *were* children, the fact that Twin Cities' population was being maintained despite the efforts to curtail it, meant that the indoctrination was far from successful. The best population curb thus far was the birthday law. You killed a member of the opposite sex at each birthday or you were executed. Is that why you were taught hatred? she wondered. She watched the boys running pell-mell across the bridge, watched their sisters and cousins hurling stones at them and cursing.

She turned away and went down to the bank. Ten minutes later she had rented a boat and was paddling swiftly downstream. In half an hour she had reached the dome-lock. Moments later, she was Outside.

"Braking rockets gone," Talbot said. "Feed tubes broken. Converter unmoored. It would take a week to fix her, kid. *If* we had all the spare parts."

"Are you trying to say we're stuck here?"

"You know it, kid. Make like Davey Crockett."

"Very funny."

"Hell, we're lucky to have escaped with our lives."

"Yes, but what a place to be stuck in."

Talbot nodded. "I won't argue with you there, Hazlett. Man, it's hot." Hot was the wrong word. There was no word in the English language to describe the oppressive, humid heat which enveloped LaSalle's Planet.

The spaceship had crash-landed in a dense jungle. So far, the two men had not strayed very far from the damaged ship. They had the usual explorers' hand weapons but although they had heard the sounds of LaSalle Planet's fauna each of the three nights since their crash, they had not seen any of the animals. Some of them crashing through the undergrowth at night or howling far off sounded as if they might be too big for the hand weapons to handle.

"Then the radio's our only

chance," Hazlett said. "If we can repair the radio and signal for help—"

"It would still take months."

"Months is better than the rest of our lives. Do we have enough food?"

"No."

"Well, look around the jungle. We won't go hungry."

"Some of that stuff might be poisonous."

"Yeah, Tally. But let's hope not."

"What about water?"

Hazlett felt better now, more confident. Talbot was the more experienced man in space and the more experienced sociologist, but it didn't appear as if they would get their ship into space again without help and so far there was no need for a colonial sociologist. And Hazlett, the two-man expedition's expert on survival, began to feel better despite his youth and their predicament.

"I heard what sounded like a large stream not far from here," he said. "I figure we ought to find it as soon as possible."

"What for? We still got water for another three days."

"Because we'll do a better job looking for it when we still have some water to fall back on."

Talbot shrugged. "You're the survival expert. When do we start?"

"Right after breakfast. But only one of us, Tally. One of us ought to be working on the radio at all times."

Talbot smiled. "I guess that makes an explorer out of me. I can fool around with some radio equipment, but not transistors. Can you handle transistors?"

"I can try," Hazlett said. "You shouldn't have much trouble finding the water, if the stream's as big as I think."

Eleanor could not shake the idea that she was being followed. She had banked her small boat at the edge of the river some thirty miles from Twin Cities and had camped nearby for three days now, living on the fish she could catch in the stream with the net she had found in the boat and the wild fruits which abounded in the jungle.

For two days now she had suspected pursuit. Little things, she thought, eating a fat round red fruit for breakfast. Sounds which didn't belong to the jungle. The faint suggestion of a cookfire smell if the wind was just right. And something instinctive, something which had no

name. She was being followed, all right, and that probably meant a man from Male City had seen her take the boat downstream and had come after her. A man who, like herself, probably had thirty days to find a victim of the opposite sex, or perish . . .

She explored her own emotions now and was almost surprised to find she was not afraid. They had trained her well in school. She had been taught how to use her lithe, flat muscles in school and although they were not the muscles of a man, she was probably as strong as any man who was not in top physical shape. She had to be: the women of Twin Cities would not survive if they weren't. Very well, she told herself now, if she were being pursued, she would turn the tables on her pursuer. She would capture him and offer him in her stead at Extinction Center. She wished suddenly that she had taken a weapon with her from the city, a knife or a strangling cord. A strangling cord was a very fine weapon. If you knew exactly how to use it, you could render a man unconscious without killing him.

She stood up on the edge of the river and took off her one-piece green jumper. It

was a hot, humid morning. All the mornings were hot and humid. She stood naked in the strong sunlight for a moment, then plunged into the cool waters of the swift-flowing stream. She swam a few strong strokes upstream against the current, then treaded water submerged to the neck. Almost, she could forget the crowds of Female City, her obligation as a woman, everything about LaSalle Planet which she hated. If she closed her eyes and let her fancies drift, she could almost imagine she was on the Planet Earth, which, according to legend, was the original home of the people of Twin Cities. Earth was not a crowded place, the legends said. Earth was a place where, incredibly, men and women lived in harmony. Earth was—

But it didn't have to be Earth, she thought suddenly, wherever Earth was. It could be this empty jungle. It was vast. It could swallow the population of Twin Cities. True, there was a taboo against living in the jungle, but the taboo made no sense. Probably, there was a reason for it somewhere in the ancestral memory, but not a very good reason.

Suddenly, a voice hailed

Eleanor. It was a man's voice and it startled her. It spoke English, all right—which was the language of Twin Cities—but spoke it rapidly, slurringly.

"Hello there," the voice said. "I'll bet it's cool in the water."

He was standing on the bank and smiling at her. He was a stocky man about thirty-five years old. He certainly should have been wearing his of-age clothing, but was not. Somehow, Eleanor did not think he was the man who had followed her from Twin Cities. And that, she told herself, made absolutely no sense, like the taboo against the jungle.

"Talbot's my name," he said. "Say, I didn't realize it. If you're undressed, I'll—"

"That's all right, Tal-bot," she said. "It's hot out."

"It's hot out." He repeated her words as if they surprised him.

She came dripping from the water, her body bronze and beautiful in the sunlight. She watched the man named Talbot watch her, and for some reason he turned away, his face crimsoning. She found her green jumper, got into it and zipped it, leaving it open at the throat. The man named Tal-bot was carrying what

looked like a weapon at the waist of his peculiar two-piece garment, but made no move to use it. She wondered what he was waiting for. She decided that the man named Talbot was probably very confident because the weapon was lethal. She decided she had better not give him the opportunity to use it.

"I'm from Earth," Talbot said.

She stood away from him warily. "You're joking. Earth is only a legend."

"Lost complete contact, eh? But you still speak the language. Odd. Can you take me to where you live."

It was some kind of trick, Eleanor thought. "I'll take you, all right."

"Just let me go back to the ship and get my friend."

"Oh! There is someone else?"

"Yes."

"We'll go alone."

"But—"

"Your friend's a man?"

"Yes. I don't see—"

"We'll go alone."

"No, I'm sorry, miss. I'll have to get my friend."

"I said, we'll go alone. I think I could handle you if I had to, Tal-bot, but not two of you."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"Just come along."

But Talbot shook his head and said, "What are you afraid of?"

"It's a long boat ride back to Twin Cities," Eleanor said. "Let's get this straight at the beginning. You're my prisoner."

"Are you joking?" Talbot said.

"You're a hunter too, aren't you?"

"A hunter?"

"Don't deny it. You've been following me. Haven't you?"

"No," Talbot said.

"I don't believe you. That strange clothing you're wearing must be some kind of ruse. Like your talk of Earth."

"The truth," Talbot persisted. "I come from Earth."

"All right, just get into the boat. And paddle."

"I said I wouldn't, not without my friend."

"Move!"

"Lady," said Talbot, "you are making it awful hard to—"

"Move!"

She grasped Talbot's arm firmly and twisted it suddenly behind his back with her strong hands. She held it that way, the wrist forced up between his shoulder blades. She forced him toward the boat, shoving the small of his

back with her free hand. "If you try anything," she said, "I'll break your arm."

"What the hell—" Talbot said, and tried to struggle free. Eleanor let go of him suddenly and he stumbled into the small rowboat. He climbed to his knees and began to turn around. A paddle was thrust at him. "Let's go," Eleanor said.

"You're crazy if you think I—"

They stood up together. The boat rocked. Talbot tried to reach the bank of the river, but she had unmoored the boat and it began to drift. When she tried to force him down on his knees so he could paddle, Talbot began to grapple with her. The boat began to rock, water sloshing over the gunwales.

"You'll overturn it!" Talbot cried.

A moment later they were floundering together in the water. Eleanor had been trained in water-fighting because hunters and victims at Twin Cities often met in the River which separated Male City from Female City. She scissored Talbot's body with her long legs and began to force his head underwater. She held him there until he finally relaxed and went limp, then she towed him toward

the bank. She dragged him out and stretched his limp form on its stomach, then began to apply artificial respiration. She grinned. She didn't think she would have any more trouble from him on the trip back to Twin Cities. She felt very good now—before another day had passed she would have earned her year of grace.

And then a voice said: "All right, woman. Get up."

She whirled swiftly. A large man in the bright orange of an of-age citizen of Male City stood behind her. He was tall and broad of shoulder, a big fellow with a superbly-muscled body. Eleanor backed away. While her considerable strength and the fighting tricks she knew could outmatch an unathletic man like the one who called himself Talbot, it couldn't match this giant.

"You're a hunter?" she said.

"How did you ever guess?"

"Keep away from me—"

The man leered at her. "I've been following you for three days," he said.

"Keep away!"

His fist suddenly swelled up before her face. She tried to parry it but could not. She fell across the body of the man she had almost drowned.

When Talbot did not return to the spaceship by mid-day, Hazlett went to look for him. The stream was where Hazlett had expected. He found it almost immediately, not half a mile from their campsite. Exploring the bank carefully, he could find no trace of Talbot. He then reasoned that Talbot might have taken an indirect route to the edge of the small river—so Talbot might be as much as a mile or so up or downstream.

It was late afternoon when Hazlett finished his search. It was as if a hole had opened in the surface of the world and Talbot had fallen into it. Hazlett returned to the spaceship. He was hungry and ate a hasty meal of dehydrated provisions, hydrating them with some of the water he had brought back from the stream. He remained awake for many hours that night, working on the damaged radio set. The generator-powered camplight gleamed brightly until dawn, serving as a beacon in case Talbot should return.

In the morning, Hazlett dressed swiftly, carefully stored the radio equipment and set out for the river again. He took provisions sufficient for several days traveling with him. He vowed not to return until he found Tal-

bot. He felt responsible for the older man. He, Hazlett, should have gone in search of the stream.

Now he worked his way upstream along the bank. He chose that direction because he remembered the view from the air as the crippled spaceship had come down. There was a ridge of low mountains a few miles to the north of their present location and upstream from it. The river's headwaters were probably located high in those mountains. And, beyond the ridge, was something which neither Hazlett nor Talbot had been able to identify. It was large and circular and gleamed like a field of a million million precious stones. Hazlett's final guess had been a pressure dome, but Talbot had said he didn't know why anyone wanted a pressure dome on a planet with breathable air. And the matter had rested there till now.

By mid-morning, Hazlett was climbing into the foothills. Here the air was cooler and the stream bubbled and frothed swiftly. Away from the humid, oppressive heat of the lowlands, Hazlett began to make better time. He smiled grimly. He was making good time, all right—but

he might be heading in the wrong direction.

"Are you asleep?" Eleanor Stedman whispered.

"No," Talbot told her.

"Well, he is. Listen. I wanted to say I'm sorry about—"

"Forget it."

"But I know the truth now. You're not from Male City. Are you really from Earth, the way you said?"

"Yes."

"Could you—could you take me back there with you?"

"If a planet has been out of contact for a long time, our policy is to exchange several ambassadors, increasing the number on a monthly basis until several hundred Earthmen are living on the alien planet and an equal number of the ex-colonists on Earth. After a period of education and familiarization—"

"I understand. I want to be among those who go, Talbot."

Talbot shrugged in the darkness. "I don't see what you can do about it."

"You mean, because of him?"

"Yes."

"He's asleep. He's stronger than either one of us alone, but together—"

"All right," Talbot said. "If you want."

"I shouldn't force you into

anything dangerous, though. It's me he's after. I'm his victim. He doesn't understand about you at all. He'd probably release you at the entrance to the city."

"And you?"

"I'm his prisoner. He delivers me to the proper government agency and thus buys himself another year of life."

"I don't get it," Talbot said.

Briefly, Eleanor explained the system to him, then said. "So you see, it's his life or mine. You have nothing to do with it."

"You're a girl," Talbot said.

Eleanor laughed softly. "As if that matters."

"Look, I said I'll help you. It's getting light already. The sun will be up in a few minutes. If you want to do anything, now's the time."

"Just wait a few minutes. Darkness is on his side, not ours. If we fight with him, we wouldn't be able to see one another. We'd get in each other's way. Wait until we can see."

They lapsed into silence. The first light of false dawn soon faded. There were vague insect sounds off in the night, and the darkness returned. But presently a pink glow appeared in the eastern sky and the stars faded. Talbot could see Eleanor reclining on the

hard ground, partially propped up on her elbows, watching the hulking figure of the sleeping man to their left. She looked at Talbot. She nodded and carefully stood up. In her hand, Talbot saw, she held a large rock.

She dropped suddenly to her knees alongside the sleeping man, bringing the rock down in a swift, savage arc. At that moment, he turned restlessly in his sleep. The rock missed his face by inches and merely grazed his shoulder. He bellowed and rolled over, toward Eleanor. He seized her wrist and the rock dropped from her hand. He dragged her to her feet.

And Talbot hit him in the side with the edge of his right hand. It made a sound like an ax going into soft wood. The bigger man roared, let go of Eleanor's hand and turned on Talbot. He got his enormous hands under the Earthman's arms, ignoring the rain of blows which struck his face. He lifted Talbot and hurled him across the embers of the campfire.

And found Eleanor, like a wildcat, on his back. By the time he could shake her loose, Talbot was back with a brand from the fire. He swung it against the giant's head. Sparks flew. The giant sank

to his knees, rubbing huge fists against his eyes. Eleanor hit him and so did Talbot, but he merely swayed there. They were unable to knock him down. He shook his head and climbed slowly to his feet. He caught Eleanor by the shoulder and drew her toward him. His fingers found her throat, closed on it.

"That's enough," Talbot said. "You win."

Laughing, the giant let Eleanor fall to the ground. "Carry her to the boat," he told Talbot.

Talbot did so.

Later that same day, Hazlett found the campfire ashes. The broken brand had dried, caked blood on it. Half a dozen feet from the fire, Hazlett found the visored cap which Talbot always wore.

He struck out northward again and was surprised when he did not find the headwaters of the river. For, at the highest point in the mountains, the river looped eastward, following the line of the razor-back ridge. Hazlett stalked steadily along the bank. There was no doubt of it now. Talbot was in trouble. Somewhere up ahead, he was perhaps fighting for his life.

On either side of Hazlett now were dense groves of

fern-like trees. Fifty yards up ahead, the river turned suddenly to the left. Hazlett could see nothing beyond that point until he actually reached the bend in the stream.

When he did so, he stood awe-struck.

The river knifed across a high flat plateau here at the ridgeline. It cut straight as a plumbline through solid rock, perhaps for three miles. And beyond it, at the far edge of the plateau, was a high, gleaming, iridescent dome.

The heat on the bare plateau was stifling. Hazlett was weak and dizzy when he reached the great dome almost an hour later. He plunged into the waters of the stream and found they were shallow here. He waded to the dome and a metallic voice boomed:

"What were you doing Outside?"

Hazlett did not answer.

"Well? Oh, never mind. You know, you're the fourth person to come back to the city today."

"Is that right?" Hazlett said. "Was one of the other a short fellow wearing clothing like mine?"

"Come to think of it, yes," the metallic voice said. Hazlett could see the amplifier on the surface of the dome above his head. He wondered where

the invisible eyes were located, the eyes which were watching him. "What kind of costume is that, anyway?"

Hazlett offered a vague answer, but the voice was already wandering on. "Say, did you know that fellow?" it asked Hazlett.

"Yes, I knew him."

"I couldn't figure his status out. Was he a prisoner of the woman? It looked that way, except she was a prisoner of the big man."

"Where did they go?" Hazlett asked. The whole interview had a dream-like quality for him. He could see no one. The dome was probably made of one-way plastiglass. He assumed he was speaking to a human being. He assumed the dome housed a city of the original Earth colonists to LaSalle Planet. But he would not know anything for sure until he got within the dome.

"To Extinction Center," the voice said. "Where else?"

"Extinction Center?"

"Say, what's the matter with you? Don't you know anything?"

"I mean, who was going to get—umm-mm, to be made extinct?"

"To tell you the truth, I couldn't figure it out. The girl, maybe. But maybe the short guy. Well, as far as I'm con-

cerned, you can come in. But you'll have to satisfy the women's guard first."

Before Hazlett had a chance to think about that, another voice boomed over the metallic amplifier. It was a woman's voice, but strident and peremptory. "Man! Pledge you did not slay a woman outside the dome without legally reporting it."

"Of course I didn't."

"Pledge!"

"I pledge."

"Pledge you did not go outside to escape a woman and somehow turn the tables on her. Pledge you have left no injured woman out there."

"All right. I pledge."

"And pledge you are not at the moment seeking a female victim."

"Yes. I pledge that, too."

"Open the domelock," the woman's voice said.

Seconds later, a section of the dome slid silently back, revealing an aperture half a dozen feet across. Hazlett stepped through—and gawked.

Immediately ahead of him was a bridge across the river. The bridge roadway was empty. Everything else was crowded.

Terra City at rush hour, Hazlett thought. On either

side of the bridge, as far as his eye could see, were people. At first he did not realize that all the men were on one side of the river and all the women on the other. There was no room to sit down. There was hardly room to walk. You could merely be borne along by the vast throngs. There was a constant hum of conversation, deep-throated on one side of the river, high-pitched on the other.

The water of the river was crowded with boats, propelled by poles. There was barely room for the boats to maneuver. Men and women shouted for the right of way. Multitudes of children darted and splashed along the banks. Two little girls darted up to Hazlett and shouted, "We'll get you! We'll get you someday!" Then they plunged away down the muddy embankment.

Hazlett began walking along one bank of the river. He seemed to be the only man there, among a million women and children. A young woman walked up to him and said boldly, "If you're of-age, why don't you wear your of-age clothing? Are you trying to hide?"

"I'm sorry," said Hazlett. "I'm a stranger here."

It was the wrong thing to say. The woman's eyes nar-

rowed as she studied him. "A stranger? What do you mean? There's no such thing."

"Could you tell me where Extinction Center is?" Hazlett asked her.

"Could I tell you! Everyone knows where Extinction Center is. Exactly who are you?"

"It doesn't matter. I merely want to know—"

The woman smiled. "I'll take you there," she said. "If you're serious."

"I'm serious."

"You'll come with me?"

"Why not?" Hazlett said.

"Very well. You're my prisoner."

Before Hazlett could answer, another woman came up alongside him. "One moment," she said. "I was watching him. I saw him first. If he's going to be anyone's victim, he's going to be mine."

"You think so?" the first woman said.

"I know so."

All at once, they flew at each other tooth and nail. A small crowd gathered, watching them. Hazlett slipped quietly away. But, he realized at once, it was impossible to remain inconspicuous for long. He wondered if he should wade out into the water, swim the narrow river and lose himself among the

men on the other side. But Extinction Center—whatever Extinction Center was—might be anyplace. There was no sense swimming the river until he assured himself the Center was not here on this side.

"Halt!" someone said. She was a tall dark-haired girl, young and not unattractive. She wore a kind of one-piece green uniform. She was armed with a club, a knife and what looked like a miniature lariat.

"Are you carrying any concealed weapons?" she asked Hazlett.

"No."

"It is forbidden for a man to carry weapons on this side of the river."

"I'm not."

"Are you a hunter?"

"No," said Hazlett, not knowing what a hunter was.

"May I see the record of your birthdate, please?"

"I don't have it with me," Hazlett said.

"You what?"

"I don't have it."

The girl's fingers found his elbow, held it. "You'll have to come along to the Center with me."

"Extinction?" Hazlett said hopefully.

"Birth, of course. Come along. It's right next door to

Extinction, but you know that."

"Of course," Hazlett said. They set out together. They were buffeted on all sides by the crowds. In fifteen minutes, they had advanced only a couple of hundred yards. They were in shadow now, under the spanning arch of the bridge. There were two large doors at the base of the bridge tower. Still holding Hazlett's elbow, the woman approached the left hand door.

"The other one is Extinction Center?" Hazlett asked her.

"Naturally. At the moment, we're going to check your birth record."

"Maybe you are," said Hazlett, and broke away from her. He sprinted toward the second door, wondering what she would do about it. Something slammed into the wood alongside his head as he reached the second door. It quivered there. It was a knife. Hazlett worked it loose from the wood and tried to open the door. It yielded before only slight pressure.

Behind Hazlett, the girl shouted something. He heard her running footsteps. He slipped the blade of the knife under his belt and plunged inside Extinction Center.

"Name?" the clerk said.

"Roger Arbew," the giant told him.

"Name of victim?"

"Eleanor Stedman," Arbew said, dragging Eleanor forward.

"Is she of-age?"

"I checked her record," Arbew told the clerk. "She's of-age."

"May I see it?"

Moments later, the clerk was satisfied on that point. "Who's the other fellow?" he demanded.

"You know," Arbew admitted, "I can't figure that out. He was with the Stedman girl. He was her prisoner. But he doesn't seem to know a thing about the City."

"That's impossible," the clerk said.

"He says he's from Earth," Eleanor Stedman explained.

The clerk looked at her. "Victims have no status here. Victims cannot talk."

"That's all right," Arbew said magnanimously. "I guess I can wait a few minutes."

The clerk looked at him scornfully. "We're busy here, as you know. We're always busy. I will read to you from the relevant statutes and we will proceed." He picked up a large book, opened it, read: "In order to keep the population of Twin Cities down it

has been ordained that every adult past his twenty-first birthday may gain the right to another year of life only by offering up a victim to Extinction Center. When the population of Twin Cities returns to normal size, this law shall automatically be null and void. Do you, Roger Arbew, avow that this woman, Eleanor Stedman, is lawfully your victim?"

"I do avow it," Arbew said.

Talbot interrupted: "Wait a minute. If that's the law, how come the population's still so large?"

The clerk looked at him scornfully. "Because the law has only been in effect for ten years. Because thus far it has served to kill off only the oldest segment of the population on anything like a grand scale. But see here: how come you aren't aware of that?"

"I said I was from Earth."

"The girl believes him," Arbew told the clerk.

"You mean, your victim?"

"Yes."

The clerk tittered. "What she believes doesn't matter. Now, does it?"

"How come you don't spread your population outside the city?" Talbot demanded. As a sociologist, he was genuinely interested. But more important than that, he

was trying to stall for time. The girl was going to die. And himself? He didn't know about himself. He had absolutely no status here in Twin Cities. He wondered if Hazlett had picked up his trail yet. He wondered what Hazlett could do about it, assuming he was on the trail, assuming he had entered Twin Cities.

"Outside the city?" the clerk was saying in a shocked voice. "Why, we can't go outside."

"Why not?"

"We simply cannot. Does such a question need an answer?"

"Forget it," Arbew said. "I guess we ought to clear up the clerical details so I can get on home."

"Listen," Talbot whispered to Eleanor. "You captured me before Arbew came along. I'm still *your* victim in a way, isn't that so?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then claim your rights."

"But they'll kill you."

"I'm not so sure of that," Talbot said. "It will give us time, anyway. They're sticklers for detail, aren't they? I have no birth records here. I don't belong. I wonder how long it will take them to figure that one out?"

Eleanor looked at him

doubtfully, but the clerk said, "Very well, Arbew. Will the victim step forward?"

"Just a moment," Talbot said. Eleanor squeezed his hand. "I'm a victim too," Talbot went on. "Eleanor Stedman's. Right?"

"I suppose so," Eleanor said uneasily.

"You mean you're substituting him for yourself?" the clerk asked Eleanor. "He would still belong officially to Arbew, you understand. You would still need another victim for yourself."

"Yes," Eleanor said.

"Then may I have the new victim's birth record?"

"I don't have it," Eleanor said.

"I haven't any," Talbot admitted.

"You haven't any?"

"I said I was from Earth. You didn't believe me."

"Just a minute now," Arbew said in an angry voice. "This is some kind of trick. They're conspiring against me. I say the girl ought to be killed and have done with it."

"I'm not sure now," the clerk said. "We can't make mistakes. I don't like this new system at all. A victim ought to be killed fair and square outside Extinction Center, I always say."

"Just let me take her outside," Arbew growled.

The clerk nodded, taking Talbot completely by surprise. "Fine," the clerk said. "This is clearly a mixup. Take her outside. Take this other man, too. Straighten it out among yourselves. And don't come back until you have a solution. You understand?"

Arbew grinned. "Sure," he said. "And listen. There's a girl I know who needs a victim. Only has a few more days. How about this fellow here? Is it all right with you if—"

The clerk said, "Don't tell me about it. Do what you want. You're not supposed to help a girl in any way, you see. Officially, I have heard nothing. But we're swamped with work. If you can take care of everything outside, that would be fine with me."

"But it isn't fair," Eleanor protested. "He's got a knife and a strangling cord. We're unarmed."

The clerk turned away and busied himself with some papers. "Well," Arbew said, "let's go." He removed the strangling cord from the loop on his belt and twirled it. He shoved Talbot toward the door. Eleanor went with him. "In the corridor," she said fiercely. "Our only chance—"

The door closed behind Arbew. The light was dim in the corridor. They could hear Arbew shuffling toward them.

Just then another door opened behind them. The loop of the strangling cord snaked across the corridor, caught Talbot's throat. "Hey!" Talbot yelled before the breath was trapped in his lungs.

"Tally?" a voice said. "Is that you, Tally?"

The appearance of a newcomer surprised Arbew. The strangling cord went slack and Eleanor slipped it quickly clear of Talbot's throat. "Hazlett?" Talbot cried. "Is it really you?"

The outside door opened again. A woman in the uniform of the security forces of Twin Cities entered the corridor. "All right, you," she said, and ran for Hazlett. "You're coming with me."

"You're Talbot's friend?" Eleanor asked Hazlett.

"Yes, but—"

"This man," she said quickly. "Trying to kill us. Can you—"

The second girl came on the run for Hazlett. At the same moment, Arbew charged across the corridor, whirling the strangling cord. Talbot met the uniformed girl halfway, but Talbot was no fight-

er. They closed for only a few seconds and Talbot went down. The girl stepped across him and sought Hazlett again, but Eleanor came between them. "I'm afraid you'll have to take me first," she said.

"I guess that leaves us," Hazlett told Arbew. "What's this all about?"

Instead of answering, Arbew drove his left fist suddenly into Hazlett's unprotected belly. Hazlett slumped forward and fell to his knees, the breath driven from his body. Arbew brought his own knee up and sent Hazlett tumbling over on his back. The Earthman lay there for a moment, trying to force air back into his lungs. Dimly, he was aware of the two girls struggling, of Talbot climbing groggily to his feet and wisely staying out of either fray, of Talbot staggering to the inner door and bolting it, of someone banging on the other side of the door.

Then Arbew launched himself at Hazlett. Had he landed on him with all his weight, Hazlett's ribs would have cracked. But Hazlett rolled away lithely, then turned back and straddled the bigger man before he could get up. He brought Arbew's arm up behind him and the giant belatedly with pain. Abruptly,

Arbew's back arched like an angry cat's and Hazlett lost his hold. Seconds later, they were rolling over and over on the hard stone floor, Hazlett fighting to get clear and Arbew fighting for a death hold.

They stood up, panting, facing each other toe to toe. Arbew's right fist blurred at Hazlett, but the Earthman rolled back on his heels and the blow missed his jaw by inches. Hazlett countered quickly with a left hook at the unprotected right side of Arbew's face. The blow landed solidly and numbed Hazlett's arm to the elbow, but it rocked Arbew back. Hazlett followed up his advantage with two hard rights over the heart and another left hook that took the bigger man at the base of his jaw. Confused and hurt, Arbew covered his face. Hazlett drove his fists into Arbew's torso, left and right and left again until both his hands were numb. Arbew stumbled back against the wall and hung there, not willing to go down. Hazlett measured him carefully. Hazlett had all the time in the world now. Arbew was finished on his feet. Hazlett brought his right fist up from behind his thigh. It came a long way and it gathered speed and when it

hit Arbew's jaw it hit with the sound of a meat cleaver striking a ripe melon. Arbew fell slowly to the floor and did not move.

Hazlett whirled, panting. Talbot was smiling. The uniformed girl was sitting against the wall, nursing a bloody nose. Eleanor stood near Talbot. They both looked very weak. They were almost supporting one another.

"I never knew anyone could fight like that!" Eleanor said breathlessly. "Arbew must outweigh your friend by fifty pounds."

Talbot smiled proudly. "Hazlett's an Earthman," he said, as if that explained it.

"Are we in any danger now?" Hazlett asked.

Eleanor shook her head. "Not unless this girl wants to make trouble."

The girl did not get up. "I need a victim," she said. "That's all. This is my last day."

Eleanor grinned. "What's wrong with Arbew here?"

Now the girl stood up. She appraised Arbew's unconscious bulk, his bruised and battered face. "Not a thing," she said happily, "except they'll wonder how I did that."

"Do you care what they think?"

"No." And the girl began to drag Arbew's unconscious form toward the inner door.

"Are we getting out of here or what?" Hazlett asked Talbot.

"Out. You bet. This girl's going to be LaSalle's first ambassador to Earth, after we get that radio fixed. It's going to take a long time, Hazlett, recivilizing LaSalle."

"You're the sociologist."

"You see, they were afraid to leave the city. It's crazy, but it's part of their ancestral memory. The original idea was this: they wanted to stay on the spot where the original fleet of colonization ships crashed so another Earth expedition could find them. But the other expedition was never sent and after a while they forgot their original purpose. They only knew they couldn't leave this spot. So they built the dome and lived here. When the population grew out of bounds—"

"But how could it have grown so much?" Hazlett protested as they opened the outer door and stood in the bright sunshine with Eleanor.

"It wasn't so much," Talbot said. "The original expedition must have numbered close to

(Concluded on page 97)

ARE YOU HUNGRY?

By HENRY STILL

EXPERT? Expert! I'm sick to death of the word!"

Dr. Alexander V. Grogan irritably mopped sweat out of the manifold layers of fat wreathed around his neck like pork sausages. "There's no such thing as an expert anymore in our brave new world. I'm not, certainly."

Words rumbled out of the massive bulk of flesh like a volcanic eruption. Grogan swiveled in his over-sized chair to confront the mousy wisp of a man who clutched a thick plastic briefcase in his lap and tried to hold his body in muscular suspension in case an earthquake should occur.

"But, Dr. Grogan," the visitor protested thinly, "you're the nearest thing to expert qualification we have. I know you abhor movement and travel, but they need your help."

On Omega was little work, lots of time to play, plenty of food and the nights were ripe for romance.

You'd think there'd be a million kids. But the birth-rate was down to nothing . . . and if it hadn't been for Dr. Grogan's big belly and keen mind, Omega today would be no more than a ghost planet!

Grogan lumped half a banana in his mouth and studied the card his caller had given him. It read: "Galactic Department for Co-Ordination of Planetary Affairs."

"What's this Neche's Omega? A disease?"

"Oh, no, sir. It's a planet in the Neche system. Thirty light years . . ." Then he flushed, realizing the great man was making a joke with him.

"And their problem?" asked Grogan with controlled softness. He stifled a healthy burp carrying the rich odor of garlic from lunch.

"Their birth rate is falling," Brown said.

"One of those new ones, eh? Raw mining community with half a dozen women?"

"No sir." Brown, the official caller, pushed nervously at his eyeballs as though his contact lenses were out of focus and plunged into the briefcase.



"There's our food plant,"
Dr. Pandor said, indicating the distant building. "Without it we'd starve."

"At last count the population was 14,685,000. Sub-tropical climate. Nearly paradise, they say, sir. First colonists went out 150 years ago and since then it's been the most popular emigration station in the sector."

"Not inbreeding then," Grogan rumbled. "Good fresh stock. You sure they've got a falling birth rate."

Brown pulled out another statistic. "Only 1,089 babies in the last planetary revolution."

Grogan finished the banana and tossed the skin in a corner. Brown watched, fascinated, as a tiny robot scavenger darted out to remove it.

"Termite," Grogan said genially. "I call him that. He'll eat anything I will."

Despite his best emotional control, Brown's nose wrinkled in disgust. Certainly, he had been told Grogan was an anachronism in an otherwise aseptic government service—but this mammoth glutton . . .

"Their plight is serious," Brown said, returning hopefully to the subject.

"Why not fly out a new batch of colonists? That should stir up the old blood."

"We're afraid it's a planetary condition," Brown explained precisely. "Perhaps

lack of a necessary atmospheric stratum, or an excess of certain rays from Neche's Star."

"Nonsense!" Grogan exploded. "They've got a thousand doctors and scientists who could determine that sort of thing in a week."

"They don't know—"

"Why pick on me?" Grogan struggled out of the huge chair, puffing with exertion. "I'm a diet man. I know food. I love food. I know eugenics, too, and a little more, sometimes, thanks to the reports four hundred assistants hand me out of the laboratory."

"But we deal in selection. How to improve the human race. And sometimes we help with over-population. Hell, what would I know about a declining birth rate?"

"I don't know, sir, but Galactic thinks—"

"The devil with what Galactic thinks! Some numbskull passed the buck because he didn't know what to do with it."

"But you'll go?"

Grogan collapsed slowly back in the chair. It squealed with the strain.

"I head a government bureau. Would you say I have a choice?"

Brown opened his mouth to answer, but shut it since he

didn't know the diplomatic reply.

"How soon?"

"Tonight," Brown whispered.

"Tonight! Great bloody space worms. They let the problem rot in somebody's desk a year and then expect me to move the universe in an hour."

Grogan opened a desk drawer and sliced off a slab of ham. He ate with his fingers and talked out of the side of his mouth.

"You better get me a ship with some room," he growled, "not one of those puny capsules they skitter around in."

"It's a big one," Brown assured him hastily.

Dr. Grogan's stateroom was as near as possible to the geometric center of the ship. Around that the worried logistician had grouped the cases of cargo to the best of his skill. Then he consigned the ship to space and to God. He wished discreetly that a man named Grogan might never return to Earth.

Someone knocked. Dr. Grogan did not shift from his half-reclining position.

"Come in," he growled through a thick slab of pie. The pilot entered.

"Ah, Captain Harris," Gro-

gan belched and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "How much longer must we be cooped up in this flying mousetrap?"

Harris mopped a bead of perspiration off his lip with an immaculate handkerchief.

"That's—ah—what I came down to see you about. Our mass is a bit excessive. It's biting into velocity and fuel pretty badly."

"You mean I'm slowing you down?" A long roll of laughter welled up out of Grogan's tremendously fat belly. Harris shifted uneasily.

"Well, not exactly you, sir. But would it be possible, do you think, to jettison part of the cargo?"

"No," Grogan said flatly. "Galactic ordered me out here. I need Hanrahan and Pinsky. They know how I operate. As for the equipment, every bit of it is essential. Every bit of it."

"Very well, sir," Harris said wearily. "We'll try to make it."

"You damn well better make it," Grogan said, "or I'll roast you over a slow fire."

Harris backed out hastily, his mind clouded by an unpleasant vision of cannibalism.

As a result, Harris tried, but not hard enough. The ship

wobbled in for a landing and crunched out on the runway. No one was hurt, but the cargo was a mess.

After an escape hatch was enlarged to accommodate him, Dr. Grogan crawled out and examined himself for bruises.

"This is terrible, doctor, just terrible," breathed a planetary representative who exhibited an anxiety complex. "I am Dr. Pandor. All of your luggage is destroyed?"

"Not luggage," Grogan puffed. "Equipment. Very essential equipment." Pandor clucked sympathetically.

But the salvage men found only broken cases of ham, chicken, sides of pork and beef and frozen pastries.

Grogan brightened considerably when he discovered the Omegans knew how to build a comfortable apartment. And his spirits soared at sight of a one-man banquet, catered, in his dining room. He fell to lustily.

"Sit down, man, sit down," he said, masticating noisily. He waved a fork to indicate a chair. "Tell me, please, what magnificent animal produces this steak?"

Pandor smiled happily.

"It isn't an animal," he said, "it's from our protein plant.

Since Omega is ninety percent ocean, we reap the plankton, convert it to the most palatable foods, and distribute it evenly to the people."

"All of your food comes from this plant?"

"Virtually. We have some hydroponics and take some wild fruits and vegetables for luxury dishes, but the staples for the entire planet come from here. We believe we have the most delicious and nutritious foods in the system."

"I agree," Grogan sighed gustily. "Indeed, I agree. Where is this marvelous factory?"

"Just there," Pandor pushed back the drapes with a flourish and Dr. Grogan looked down from 50 floors high upon a tremendous, snow-white windowless building, built over the edge of the sea.

"You must take me to see it," he said, "but first let's bite into this birth rate business."

"It's virtually nil," Pandor said unhappily. "Below the age of ten you hardly see any children at all."

"What have you done about it?"

"Individual tests on married men and women. Abolishment of all contraceptives, although that's hardly necessary. The planet has a uniform anxiety neurosis about

it. There is no congenital sterility, except in isolated cases—"

"Hormones?"

"Not necessary. The males are vigorous, the females receptive, in fact, rather rabid now they are threatened with perpetual loss of motherhood."

"Meiosis normal?"

"Eighty-five percent, yes."

"Have you tried chromosectomy?"

"We're experimenting with that now, but the controlled cases show no improvement."

Dr. Grogan pursed his lips thoughtfully. "You married, Pandor?"

Pandor flushed embarrassedly.

"You and Mrs. Pandor childless?"

Grogan's host stared at the floor and wrung his hands nervously. He nodded affirmative.

"Good Lord, man. Don't tell me you still think it reflects on your manhood!"

He read his answer in his host's eyes.

"Your insane wards must be crowded," Grogan muttered. "How about diet? That would be perfect, I suppose, with this wonderful food machine of yours."

Pandor nodded, brightening a bit.

"Maybe your people, as a race I mean, just want to die."

Pandor gasped at the monumental concept.

"Oh, no! It can't be that. How can it be when every couple wants children desperately?"

Grogan sipped an after-dinner wine, savoring it sensuously. The sound of his drinking indicated the depth of thought. After a while he waddled to the window and stared down at the vista-dominating food factory. Pandor was poised tensely in the chair when Grogan turned back.

"Tell me, Pandor, do any of your older families have fertility books. You know, old recipes handed down from generation to generation to help along male potency."

"Yes," Pandor said hesitantly, "there are such things."

"Bring them," Grogan directed. "I'm primarily a diet man. I love food. In my years dealing with race selectivity I haven't found many problems I couldn't solve with food administered in proper doses at the proper time. Maybe there's something your fancy plant is taking out of the food."

"I'm sure that's not true," Pandor said. "We've explored every possibility. You may find something in the fertility

manuscripts, but we've gone through that, too." He finished rapidly, fearing to offend.

"Let me see them just the same."

Pandor hurried out. An hour later he brought in a bundle of books and old manuscripts.

Grogan spent two days in solitary study and sent for Dr. Pandor again.

"Have you looked at this old Twentieth century volume by de Castro?"

"Not personally," Pandor answered nervously. "I had an assistant spend considerable time with it."

"It's quite interesting," Grogan tapped the yellowed volume reflectively. "Perhaps something we can use."

Pandor's face brightened like a child excused from afternoon at school.

"Please, no undue optimism," Grogan cautioned professionally. "This will require some experimentation."

"Anything you need, doctor! Anything at all."

"Food," said Grogan. "Bring me samples of every food your protein factory produces." Pandor hurried to the door.

"Generous samples," Grogan called, "enough to feed three men for eight or ten weeks."

It was a strange request,

but Dr. Pandor complied. He offered the Earth expert full laboratory facilities, but the great man insisted upon working in his apartment with only Hanrahan and Pinsky to assist. A mammoth food freezer was installed and stocked.

Later a delegation of prominent scientists, waiting in the foyer, whispered excitedly when Hanrahan and Pinsky hurried out, each carrying a heavy case in his arms.

That night Dr. Grogan watched from the window of his apartment while the beautiful food factory crumbled noisily to dust.

An hour later, as expected, the scientific delegation poured in, screaming panic and fear.

"This is disastrous," Pandor cried tremulously, his face ashen pale. "The people have food to last not more than a week. What can we do?"

Dr. Grogan clucked sympathetically. "No other food factories?"

Pandor shook his head while the other good doctors hummed with frantic helplessness.

"How about indigenous plants and animals?"

"Not enough," Pandor cried. "We could trap and kill, and harvest enough native fruit

for a few weeks, but then . . .” He spread his hands helplessly.

“I suggest,” Dr. Grogan said blandly, “that you do that, as rapidly as possible.”

A gray-haired savant pushed his way forward.

“We will appreciate what help you can give us, doctor,” he said. “We have asked Galactic for emergency assistance.”

“I will help every way I can,” Grogan assured solemnly and dismissed the party courteously. He was having a midnight snack when Hanrahan and Pinsky came in.

“We had to break into the comm station,” Hanrahan reported.

“I expected that.”

“And we conked the operator,” said Pinsky.

“We sent your warpgram,” Hanrahan said, “urgent all stations.”

“You used my symbol?”

The two hatchet men nodded solemnly.

“Good,” said Dr. Grogan, “now we’ll see.”

Frantic thumping on the door roused him at dawn. Dr. Pandor, unshaven and shopworn, entered hesitantly. Grogan sat up groggily, swathed in a tent of sleepcloth.

“Pardon my intrusion,”

Pandor said nervously. “We have a desperate new crisis.”

“What now?”

“Galactic has refused to send food ships. The planet has been placed under quarantine.”

“Great Scott! Why?”

“We don’t know,” Pandor said. “We just don’t know.” He passed a trembling hand over his face.

“Very strange,” Grogan said. “But it does narrow the scope of your problem, doesn’t it?”

“Is there anything you can do to influence Galactic?”

Grogan shook his head.

“I’m afraid not, doctor. In the cosmic view, I’m quite a small official. By the time my words filtered through channels, it would be too late to help you.”

Pandor left, head bowed in defeat.

Grogan smiled and broke open a carton of artificial eggs.

As the weeks passed, he received detailed reports as the planet moved to revolutionize its methods of food supply. Fishing fleets hurried to sea. Hunting rifle manufacture boomed. Farm implements were put to use.

And the protein plant was rebuilding.

But the calories dropped.

Dr. Grogan watched the figures as they fell gradually to the level which would barely sustain healthy life—and then below the mythical red line of danger which spelled malnutrition.

Even Grogan was disturbed. He was nearing the end of his generous private stock of *experimental* food.

Panic was an intangible substance in the air the next time Pandor came to see him. The doctor was emaciated from overwork and near starvation.

Grogan was eating a generous dinner of fabricated roast chicken. Pandor nearly fainted when he saw the solitary banquet.

"May I—" he asked, edging greedily near the table.

"I'm sorry," Grogan said gently, "no. I have barely enough to sustain my own flesh and bone." Weary with despair, Pandor collapsed in a chair.

"Is there any news?"

"None of hope," Pandor said. "We're starving—everyone is starving. And now my wife is pregnant."

"Indeed? And are there any others?"

"I don't know," Pandor said dully. "I'll check if you like."

"Don't bother," Grogan said. Look at this. He tossed

over a sheaf of papers clipped together. Pandor studied it with bewilderment and looked up.

"Over two thousand," he said wonderingly, "in a week. More than all last year."

"The experiment was successful, then," Grogan smiled over a drumstick, "at the expense of one modern food factory."

"I don't understand."

"Quite simple, really," Grogan said. He picked up the old book. "Here's a good text, but you overlooked it, de Castro's *Geography of Hunger*. He postulated that malnutrition increases human fertility as the species attempts to perpetuate itself against hardship."

Comprehension moved slowly through Pandor's hunger.

"You destroyed the food plant?"

Grogan nodded. "Drastic measures for a drastic problem. I trust no one will prefer criminal charges against me. It could have been done more gradually, I suppose, but it's difficult to convince people they should starve themselves on occasion."

"And the quarantine?"

"I'll see that it's lifted at once. But your job is to see that strict diet controls are enforced from now on. The

human animal is best when he's hungry."

Grogan munched a juicy chicken breast and mopped his chin.

"Now that things are under control here, I think I'll go home and take care of my own

population problem." He sighed unhappily.

"You have no children?" Pandor asked sympathetically.

"On the contrary," said Dr. Grogan, "I have thirteen."

THE END

LIBEL

(Concluded from page 63)

An age of sadness pressed upon Grumley's shoulders.

"It folded?" he mumbled. "And what did I do?"

"You held various editorial positions with other magazines, I believe. Then your obituary said something about

janitoring at the Museum of Natural History."

"My obituary—" George choked. "What about Perry?"

"Oh, that turned out very well," Polly shifted sensuously in the chair.

"I married him." **THE END**

LADIES

IN WAITING

(Concluded from page 87)

a million. The population growth was large, but by no means impossible."

"Well," Hazlett said as they approached the river and found a boat, "I said it before: you're the sociologist."

They climbed into the boat. They paddled downstream and soon went through the dome-lock. No one questioned them on the way out. Twin Cities was glad to get rid of any of its population.

"Earth," said Eleanor. "I

still can't believe it. You're taking me to Earth."

"After we fix our radio and get a repair ship out here," Hazlett said. "Anyway, Talbot's taking you, not me. You can work the LaSalle Planet problem out between you."

"And you?" Talbot asked.

"I'm younger than you are," Hazlett said. "I'm just getting started. I have a whole universe to see."

Talbot smiled. "I guess you have," he said. **THE END**

ARE YOU HUNGRY?

THE POISON PEN

By MILTON LESSER

Perhaps, after finishing this story, you'll make the remark that "it couldn't happen here!"

Well, all we can say is that you may have the right answer and that's fine. But if you should be the type to read the morning Tribune carefully, you may learn that it not only could happen—but actually has!

18 March 1997

THERE'S dancing in the streets today! I'm so excited, I can hardly write these words, but we have a diary reading in our block at 2200 hours tonight, so I have to get something down. The Masters went as suddenly as they came. We don't know where they came from nor why they held the Earth for thirty years. We don't know yet why they decided to leave. Perhaps we'll never know, but does it matter? We're free. First reaction of everyone I met: sheer joy. The cold wind and driving rain doesn't stop them—they're dancing. But underneath it all, you can almost smell the fear and uncertainty on the air. I'm glad I was never a co-operationist.

It's time for the diary reading. More later.

2400 hours—The usual stuff at the diary reading. Mrs. Campbell, though, is thinking of divorce because her husband was a Co-op. You should have seen his face—obviously, it was the first he heard about it. Jack Tisdall seduced the Mallory girl two nights ago. Poor kid was blushing to beat the band, but she should have known it would come out at the reading. I'll bet every eligible bachelor—and some who are not—will try to date her. Mrs. Mallory practically dragged her from the reading room over at the public school. A pretty pink behind is going to be made pinker tonight, yes sir. Sam Faloney's business isn't doing too well.



Moral: keep a diary and the pen you use may be your suicide weapon!

Dr. Trillis caused the most comment, though. They just don't make people like Dr. Trillis anymore; but then, he was a mature adult before the Masters got here. The professor said there's going to be trouble because we're all exhibitionists. That was his word, exhibitionists. I'd like to look it up some time in some of his own books. From the cradle, he said, the Masters made us compulsive exhibitionists, and the older generation either had to go along with it or feel left out. Down to the smallest block in the smallest town the Masters could tell what was going on that way, he said. Then he dropped his bombshell.

We ought to get rid of diaries and diary reading. We ought to teach our children to keep secrets and we can start by not rewarding them for tattling. It might even be a good idea (said Dr. Trillis) to wear clothing in the summer time. I can't see the connection, but he claims it's part of the same exhibitionism. I don't claim to understand him more than anyone else did, but when Dr. Trillis speaks, I'll at least give him the courtesy of listening.

20 March

Nuts! I called Diane Mal-

lory for a date tonight and found myself number fifteen on a waiting list a mile long. That lucky stiff, Jack Tisdall. Diane was wearing lace paint to match her dark hair and a shimmering breast veil. Mrs. Mallory was there behind her, scowling at me throughout the conversation and scribbling busily in her diary. Already you can see the kind of stuff we'll have to put up with, thanks to Jack Tisdall. Diane's the prettiest girl on the block and this was the first time I ever saw her wearing the veil indoors.

21 March

Mrs. Campbell won't have to get her divorce after all. We had a near-lynching on the block today.

I was on my way to work this morning, when I saw a crowd near the subway entrance. Somehow you can tell when a crowd looks ugly, like the time when Bertie Schultz refused to read from his diary last year and everyone wanted to take a swat at him till he changed his mind.

Anyway, I started pushing my way through because I was going to be late, since I'd already missed the 7:48 for Manhattan.

"Watch out, Johnny Cooper!" someone cried. "You're

in the way, I can't see what's going on."

Probably, it had started with Mrs. Campbell hen-pecking her husband about how he'd been a Co-op with the Masters. He kept on saying he'd discuss it later and was going to be late and would she please let him catch his train. He's a little guy with thick glasses and bewildered-looking eyes and seemed more surprised than anyone when George Fuller from down on the corner poked an umbrella in his ribs and said, "Let the wife talk."

Mr. Campbell tried to push his way through to the subway stairs, but George Fuller stood in his way, using the umbrella almost like a sword. A couple of youngsters started pushing Mr. Campbell from behind and yelling, "Co-op, dirty Co-op," and it looked like the little guy might fall down the stairs, only George Fuller was in the way with his umbrella.

"We didn't know they'd leave," he wailed. "None of you liked them, I heard it at the diary readings. Please, I'll be late."

Then George Fuller leered at him and said, "Go ahead, Co-op. Catch your train"—and stepped out of the way. The kids shoved again, and

poor Mr. Campbell went tumbling down the stairs. Mrs. Campbell made a quick notation in her diary—and plenty of other people were doing some furious writing too—then ran downstairs after him, still nagging.

The crowd followed and surrounded Mr. Campbell at the bottom of the stairs, taunting him. Every time he tried to get up and brush off his torn overcoat, someone would shove him down again. There was a lot of ugly talk and a couple of express trains flashed by while the kids who'd done the pushing started to kick Mr. Campbell.

"None of you liked them," he cried again. "Neither did I. It's in my diary. You can see it."

Someone said, "But we weren't co-operationists."

"It's in my diary." More kicking. "Stop. It hurts." His lips were swollen, his nose was leaking blood.

He seemed outraged that they wouldn't believe what was in his diary. It was a point and I was beginning to wonder what Dr. Trillis would make of it, but also wishing they'd leave Mr. Campbell alone. Then the professor came to catch his own train to where he teaches at Columbia University. He's got a

quick mind to go with his scholarly looks, that Dr. Trillis. He began a long harangue about how we should all work together after the Masters had gone, and let bygones be bygones and how, if it was in Mr. Campbell's diary that he didn't like the Masters, it must have been true, even if he had been a Co-op. Well, Dr. Trillis got the crowd to feeling sheepish, even George Fuller. Me and Jack Tisdall had to manhandle the two kids who were doing the kicking, though.

I told Dr. Trillis I'd foot the bill for his favorite dinner tonight, baked stuffed ham, if he'd answer some questions. He said "yes" fast. I guess professors are underpaid.

Incidentally, the reason Mrs. Campbell doesn't have to get a divorce after all is because her husband is leaving town, and under the old Master laws where labor had to be relocated and such, an annulment is automatic.

2200 hours—Dr. Trillis was quite willing to answer any question I asked him. Only trouble was, each answer led to half a dozen more questions. But the biggest surprise of all came right at the beginning of the meal.

"We'd better not leave here

together, Johnny," Dr. Trillis said. "I broke up the mob. You helped. There's talk about some people being too sympathetic to the Masters—us included."

"But that's crazy. We just stopped them from maybe killing him, that's all."

Dr. Trillis shrugged and washed down some ham with beer. "In one way, it's a good sign. They're not taking for granted everything they hear on reading night. Otherwise, it's all bad."

"Where will it lead to?" I asked him.

"Hard to say, Johnny. You see, the Masters could keep tabs on all the people by means of our diaries. It's a form of exhibitionism, which is why all forms of exhibitionism have been not only condoned and approved, but encouraged. But now the Masters have departed."

"Where'd they go?" I asked. "And why?"

"We don't even know where they came from or why—except that they were peeping Toms of a sort. They're on the way home now, with whatever information they wanted. Their home may be one of the familiar stars in a constellation we know; it may be a star we've never seen, not even with the biggest tele-

scope. Some day, I like to think, we'll go out there looking for them. But we've got to take into consideration first things first."

I said I didn't understand.

"Well, some people are more naive than others. There will be some who suddenly realize we'll have to put an end to exhibitionism—"

"You mean, like you?"

"—and others who will realize that exhibitionism and diaries are on the way out but right now can still make mighty potent weapons. It's these we'll have to look out for, Johnny. If they're unscrupulous, they can turn the diaries to their own advantage. Remember, we believe everything we see in them. If it was written in your diary, for example, that you were thinking of committing suicide and then someone murdered you—chances are he'd never be looked for, let alone found."

"But I don't want to kill myself!"

"You're taking me too literally. Before I came here tonight, my diary was stolen. I think I can tell you this, Johnny: I'm afraid. I think that diary is going to turn up some day with things in it I never wrote. That's why I think we'd better not be seen

together. It's you I'm thinking of."

There was more talk and more food, then I paid the bill with nearly half a week's wages and went home. I had the strange feeling I was being followed, but every time I turned around, the street seemed dark and deserted.

4 April

Tonight's my date with Diane Mallory. Zowie!

5 April

I don't care if Jack Tisdall teases me and says she told him the same things or not, but here are some of the things Diane told me. I'm more of a gentleman than the other guys on the block. I dance better. She likes the feel of my hand on her shoulder. She was hoping I'd do more than just kiss her goodnight on our first date. It might be weeks before she could see me again. I smell of leather and pipe smoke—so like a man, she said. She was delighted to have a nightcap in my apartment. Her mother was up to all hours in her place, anyway. (She was wearing only the painted lace this time, under her evening wrap.)

The hell with Jack Tisdall. Let him snicker if he can

when he reads this. I don't have to envy him any more over Diane Mallory, not one little bit.

Incidentally, I'm writing this in a brand new diary because I must have misplaced the old one. Looked everywhere, but can't seem to find it. Well, it'll turn up one of these days.

7 April

I'm getting worried. I looked all over for my old diary, but can't find it anywhere. It's not in the apartment, that's for sure. It's not anyplace in the neighborhood I might have been. It's not in my office. Every time I think of what Dr. Trillis said, I get scared. Maybe someone will be able to give me information about it at reading night the day after tomorrow.

9 April

Just got back from the diary reading—and what news! Dr. Trillis didn't show up, which is bad enough—but they found *his* diary. I don't know what to believe.

Here are some excerpts which I took down word for word:

"The Masters are a power for good, not evil. We're too backward a race to recognize this fact, and it wouldn't sur-

prise me if one of these days they turned their backs in disgust and let us stew in our own juice. That would be a black-day for humanity." (That doesn't sound like Dr. Trillis at all.)

"The only thing bad about being a co-operationist is you can't tell the people. It's the one thing you can keep secret, or so the Masters say. Since I'm going to write this down but not read it at the reading, I don't have to be afraid of what I say. Of course I'm a co-operationist, and proud of it. We used to call co-operationists quislings at first, but the Masters made us stop. Connotations, they realize, can be pretty damaging to reputations." (Jack Tisdall pointed out that anyone—anyone at all—might have been a co-operationist since, according to Dr. Trillis, the Masters encouraged secrecy on that one item. So now, on circumstantial evidence alone, they can accuse people of being Co-ops. But what purpose it will serve I can't quite figure. I'm sure Dr. Trillis would know. And I *still* don't think he was a co-operationist, despite what Tisdall and the others read from his diary.)

"Today, without warning, the Masters left. We shall miss them sorely."

"Poor Mr. Campbell was almost lynched this morning. The outrage of trying to harm a co-operationist leaves me almost sick to my stomach. Only the rabble hate co-operationists."

"I wonder if I will be able to pick up the pieces of a now-meaningless life? The Masters are gone; the rabble takes over. I wonder, is life worth living?" (Now, that certainly isn't the professor talking, I don't care what they say. He was a humanitarian all the way, and he loved life. Is this what he meant by compulsive exhibitionism? I realize I'd be wiser not to write this down because people are going to hear it, but I've got to write it because this is the way I feel. Like Diane Mallory removing the breast veil as soon as she leaves her mother's sight?)

"I'd better destroy this diary while I still have the opportunity. If it's read, I haven't a chance." (And Jack Tisdall explained how he found the professor's diary, smouldering but not ruined, on the edge of our block's incinerator. Looked burned, too.)

So, that's about it. The block's vigilante committee has a warrant for Dr. Trillis' arrest. The charge: co-opera-

tionist, not reading his complete diary, trying to destroy his diary. I'd hate to be in his shoes, but I can't help feeling sorry for him and believing that he didn't write all that business they said he did.

I dreamed about Diane Mallory last night.

13 April

Friday the 13th, and if ever Dr. Trillis believed in black cats and broken mirrors and walking under ladders and the like, he believes it double now. Ordinarily, the vigilante committee doesn't have jurisdiction off our block, but special arrangements were taken and Dr. Trillis was captured while leaving a classroom at Columbia University in Manhattan today. The Columbia committee didn't help in the capture—but didn't hinder it, either.

They brought the professor back and have him, under guard, in the basement of building 6 down near the corner. By "they" I mean Jack Tisdall and the other members of our vigilante committee. So far, the professor's being held incommunicado, but you'd be putting a noose around your own neck if you tried to talk with him, anyway.

Diane Mallory—who's been leading me a merry chase, by

the way—seems to know more about what's going on than most people, since she spends a great deal of time with Tisdall, the lucky so-and-so. Maybe I'll call her later tonight and try to find out.

I had that odd feeling I was being followed again last night, but the more I looked for whoever it was, the less sure I was that I was being followed. Probably my imagination, but I sure hope no one decides to "find" my diary. I still don't see how I could have lost it.

LATER—Diane wasn't at home. Mrs. Mallory admitted she was out with Jack Tisdall. Strangely, Mrs. Mallory isn't so mad about Diane and Jack—or Diane and anyone else—any longer. It's as if she didn't like it but now thinks it will do her girl more good than harm. Worth looking into, if I had the time.

16 April

I've had it. Wish I didn't have to stop to scribble this thing down. My goose is cooked. More later. I have to find a place to hide. Damn this writing compulsion. And damn Diane Mallory too, for that matter.

17 April

A warrant's out for my

arrest, as I suspected. Someone almost saw me yesterday. Have to be careful. There's the old Myers shack, three blocks north of here. Should make a good hiding place. I hurt my leg pretty bad in that fight at the diary reading, but at least I got away. You can't miss this limp, though.

18 April

I guess they're looking for me, but they haven't thought to come north three blocks and try the old Myers shack. It gets pretty cold in here at night, with the wind whipping in through torn shingles on the roof. If it rains, I'll be drenched. I've spent most of the night hours scrounging around for food. Never put on weight that way, but at least I'm not starving.

I'm going to take this breather to write down what happened on the night of April 16. Not very pretty, but I guess Dr. Trillis was right. I got to the diary reading as usual and was going to await my turn and explain what I was doing with a brand new diary, when Diane Mallory popped up and gave me a shock. She held my old diary in her hand, claiming she found it in my apartment and it was her duty as a loyal citizen of the block to read some

excerpts. I protested that I'd always read everything I wrote but Jack Tisdall took the floor and asked me, "In that case, what do you have to worry about?"

I grumbled and listened as Diane started to read. I never wrote those things! I never said, "I hope it's all a mistake. I hope the Masters decide to come back, because we need them." I never wrote, "If the people on the block ever find Dr. Trillis' diary, he's done for. His only hope is that the incinerator fire did a good job. The people—the vapid, blundering people—can't realize, or won't realize, or don't want to realize that the Co-ops are the best friends they ever had. Aside from the Masters, of course." I've never been a Co-op. I never even thought like a Co-op. Someone wrote those things there after Diane Mallory had stolen my diary. I'm not one to go around accusing people, but any way you looked at it, the finger pointed at Jack Tisdall.

"Those are nothing but lies!" I cried, standing up and trying to take the diary from Diane's hands. Men stood between us, pushed me away, shoved me back in my chair. "Someone's trying to frame me!" I shouted. "Don't ask me why. I don't know why. I de-

mand to see that diary. I can show you it's not my handwriting, just like Dr. Trillis never wrote all those things you said he did."

I was shouted down. I could do my hollering at the vigilante tribunal next week.

I guess I lost my temper, because I hardly remember what happened next. Diane Mallory looked very self-righteous, more so than the rest of them. I think I yelled something about Jack Tisdall, for he smiled at Diane, then leered at me. All at once, we were fighting. I felt the knuckles of my right fist strike his face, felt the contour of his nose crunch, felt the good numbing pain shoot up my arm to the elbow.

Then, with Tisdall falling back into the crowd, his face an ugly red smear, I plunged out into the darkness. I heard Diane Mallory screaming, saw the others rising, their shapes silhouetted before the light, to pursue me.

I fled.

19 April

The rain, very cold. I'm drenched, and I've been coughing all day. I'm afraid to leave the Myers shack now, because they'll find me. I went out looking for food about an hour ago and found a dis-

carded newspaper, the neighborhood gazette, four pages of cheaply mimeographed paper. The headline was:

DR. TRILLIS FACES EXECUTION TONIGHT

If I remain here, they'll find me. I could leave the neighborhood—or leave the city entirely—but where would I go? There's so much I don't understand. Dr. Trillis could supply the answers, I'm sure. But this is Dr. Trillis' last night of life. They're going to kill him.

Because they fear him? Because, somehow, the Masters instilled in them a sickness which he doesn't share? I think so.

I've got to find out.

20 April

Dr. Trillis is not dead!

This will be my last entry in the diary. Dr. Trillis smiled when I told him I must write down what happened last night. It doesn't matter whether I set it down on paper or not: *they* will never see it.

The crowd gathered in the rain outside Building 6 last night. The rain drummed down on their umbrellas. It was dark and cold but they were tense and expectant,

like spectators at an athletic event. I slipped in among them, jostled by elbows and hips. It was the last place they would look for me. I listened:

"... already drawn lots. Five lucky stiff's are going to shoot him."

"... of course he has to die. If a man doesn't write the truth in his diary—"

"What are diaries for?"

"Who said that? Traitor!"

I moved closer to the brick wall of the building. Most of the windows were dark, but a dull yellow glow came up from the cellar entrance. About half an hour after I got there, limping on my injured leg, I saw Jack Tisdall arrive. I couldn't help smiling with satisfaction when I saw the bandage across the bridge of his nose and the swelling under his left eye, but I stopped smiling when I thought of Dr. Trillis.

Tisdall disappeared down the ramp to the basement. A man carrying a carbine weather-slung across his right shoulder marched back and forth slowly, stolidly, keeping the crowd off the ramp.

If they kill Dr. Trillis, I told myself suddenly, they will have to kill me with him. A chill came over me, but it wasn't fear. All at once, I was not afraid. It was expectation

and I had never felt anything like that feeling.

I waited on the fringe of the crowd until they began to drift toward the basement entrance again. Someone said, "I think he's coming."

And, another voice:

"Hooray for Jack Tisdall!"

Tisdall came first, arrogant despite his disfigured face. Dr. Trillis was behind him, shoulders back, head up, unafraid. Two armed guards followed Dr. Trillis, smirking.

"Executioners, forward!" someone bellowed.

Five figures detached themselves from the crowd and a lane was cleared to the curb, where a man I didn't know opened the tailgate of an old station wagon and produced a rifle chest. It was opened and, in the light of a flashlight, five carbines slick and gleaming with oil were removed. The executioners were armed, checked their weapons, stood back.

I held my breath. My palms felt dry and hot. My heart was beating as loud and unsteadily as the uneven idling of the station wagon's engine.

They marched Dr. Trillis through the lane to the curb. At first I thought they would take him somewhere in the station wagon, but instead they went on marching across

the street with him and stood him against the brick wall of Building 7. Smirking, the five executioners began to follow them.

The last one in line was Doug Lafferty, a plump middle aged man, proprietor of the neighborhood grocery. I waited until he had one foot off the curb, until the crowd began to flow in a quick tide around him and across the street.

"Doug," I said softly.

He turned around. He looked at me. He opened his mouth to shout, but I drove my left fist into his belly and he exhaled air instead. He had a puzzled look on his face. Puzzle and pain, I thought. It was the look of everyone since the Masters' unexpected conquest and since their abrupt departure. I hit him again and grabbed the carbine before it could clatter against the curb.

"Hey, that's the guy we've been looking for!" a man shouted.

I clubbed at his face with the butt of the carbine. I don't know if I hit him or not, but he disappeared in the gloom. They were all yelling by now, all turning from Dr. Trillis toward me.

"Run, Dr. Trillis!" I cried, and fired my carbine into the air.

Other shots answered it, but the crowd was still between me and Dr. Trillis' executioners. Frenzied and afraid now, the crowd broke. Two still figures were left on the pavement as I sprinted across the street. The carbines shattered the sudden silence and something knife-edged and hot slammed into my shoulder. I staggered but kept going. I thumbed the carbine to automatic and squeezed off half the clip blindly, then found myself on the other side of the street.

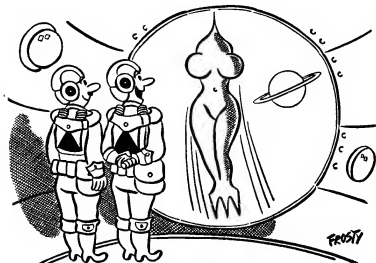
"The station wagon!" Dr. Trillis cried.

I nodded. My shoulder was numb now. I had fired the

light rifle with one hand and did not know if I had the strength to do it again.

Dr. Trillis took my arm, ran with me. Once I turned and saw Jack Tisdall leading half a dozen armed men after us. I stumbled, then hurled the carbine with all my strength into Tisdall's face. He screamed, fell back, momentarily halting the pursuit.

We gained the station wagon three or four strides ahead of the nearest men. I remember Dr. Trillis slamming the door shut on the driver's side. I was drifting off into a warm wet fog of forgetfulness and not caring. The tires screeched. The wag-



"Ah! There goes our sister ship!"

on lurched from side to side.
"Behind you!" Dr. Trillis cried.

Somehow, I turned around. Without thinking, I vaulted over the seat of the station wagon. A man was clinging to the tail gate, trying to lift himself up and inside. He snarled like an animal. I staggered toward him as the wagon skidded around a corner on the wet ground. I stamped on his hands with my heels. I placed my foot against his face and pushed. He fell back into the rain, screaming . . .

When I awoke, the sun was shining. It wasn't Dr. Trillis kneeling beside me. It was a beautiful young woman I had never seen before.

"You're all right now," she said. "You're safe. Everything's going to be all right."

"Dr. Trillis?" I said.

"He's here. He's safe, too. Rest."

But I sat up and looked around. Rhododendron and mountain laurel clung to the rocky hillside in front of me. "Where . . ." I began.

"In New Jersey. Dr. Trillis will tell you."

Her name was Lorie. Lorie. I vowed I would know her better. I watched her walk away, watched Dr. Trillis coming toward me.

"You saved my life," he

said. His voice was unsteady.

I grinned. "I had to. You were the only one who could answer my questions."

"It's like a peep show with them," he told me. "The Masters wanted it that way, so they could keep tabs on us, one man spying on another for them. But when the Masters left their training proved too strong. Humanity is sick, don't you see?"

"Yes," I said, "but—"

"The diaries shouldn't have meant a thing now. But they meant everything. It was as if the Masters hadn't returned to wherever they came from. It will be that way for a long time, except among the few people who somehow haven't been contaminated."

"Yes," I said, beginning to understand.

"Here in this settlement are some of those people. We have to prepare, and wait, and build—until one day . . ."

His words drifted on. "Good people," I said. "Like Lorie."

He smiled. "Like Lorie."

"And we have to build together?"

"Yes."

It was a wonderfully green and sweet-scented valley nestled in the hills. I stood up and went looking for Lorie.

THE END



WHILE this column was being written, President Eisenhower however announced that the United States will have a small, unmanned satellite in space sometime in 1957-58. And there are rumors going the rounds that we already have shot a rocket up some 800 miles. I can't tell you whether the rumor is true or not, but I can tell you that this late news poses a problem for science fiction writers.

Time was when every s-f story had its hero attempting to unlock the secrets of the atom. Came 1945—and that story died. Then there's the story concerned with Man's attempt to reach space and visit the Moon. If 1957-58 sees a space satellite some 300 miles above our heads, by 1960 we should have a larger, manned satellite, and by 1965 we should be on Luna. What will the poor science fiction writers do then?

Many of my readers have written in to complain that our authors are over-specializing in parapsychology, psionics—call it what you will. Is it any wonder, when reality takes away one plot element after another? But I have no worries on that score. I'm sure that the fertile imagination of our ablest writers will devise new ideas and new plots which, even in the era of space flight, you will be able to enjoy. . . .

THE ANT MEN. *By Eric North. 216 pp. Winston Co. \$2.00*

In terms of excellence, the Winston series of juveniles has had as many ups and downs as a kid on a pogo stick. Sometimes the s-f juveniles have been good; at other times, awful. This latest book, I'm afraid, falls into the latter category. As

ineptly written a tale as I've ever encountered, it attempts to tell the adventures of a pair of boys and their two adult companions in the central Australian desert. There they discover six-foot ants and giant mantises. You can take it from there: Will Our Heroes Escape These Savage Survivors From the Dawn of History? Will Nugget ever stop saying, "Mama, Mama"? Will the author ever give up whatever pipe smoked up this dream?

Surely neither Winston's editors nor the writer can believe that junior-grade s-f readers are as devoid of taste as the issuance of this mendacity implies. Not being an entomologist, I can't tell you how accurate are the author's explanations of ant and mantis attributes, but if they're anything like his style . . . !

A WAY HOME. By Theodore Sturgeon. 333 pp. Funk & Wagnalls. \$3.50

Ted Sturgeon is a writer possessed of many surprises. He intrigues you with his scientific extrapolation—as in "Unite and Conquer"; impresses you with his grasp of sociology—as in "Thunder and Roses"; his humor, in "Mewhu's Jet," and "The Huckle Is a Happy Beast" is beyond cavil; and he explores the fear-haunted pathways of parapsychology as few other writers can, notably in "Bulkhead," and ". . . And My Fear Is Great."

This collection of his latest tales, selected with skill by Groff Conklin, is his best to date. In it we can see clear and plain the gifts of an unusual writer who, but for some subtle misapplication of direction, would stand torso and head above the rest of the authors in the field—yea, even unto that master of lucidity, The Heinlein, himself. Personally, I like Sturgeon's poetic touches better than I do Bradbury's; I respect a master of conscious style. I am certain that Sturgeon consciously and with unusual versatility fits a style to his story, its meaning, and its emotional content. I admire the humanity of Sturgeon's characters. They dream, breathe, live, fear, and laugh as they labor, sweat, carol, leap and bound. Each story is a caracole; it never stands still. You may disagree with his aims, but you cannot gainsay his performance.

This large, well-printed collection of eleven stories, novellettes, and novellas is a *must* for every aficionado's collection.

NOT THIS AUGUST. *By C. M. Kornbluth. 190 pp. Doubleday & Co. \$2.95*

The date is 1956, and the United States has been defeated in its war with the Communist East. Now, this is not a new plot idea. But Mr. Kornbluth is too skilled a craftsman to rely on clichés: he transforms a hackneyed idea into an exciting, vivid consideration of the dreams Man lives by, and the price of his liberty.

Billy Justin, free-lance artist eking out an existence on an upstate New York farm, begins to realize what he has lost with the passing of that simple (and complex) word, "democracy." Despite his instinct for self-preservation, in spite of the doubts of his intelligence and the none-too-admirable example of many of his fellow Americans, he joins the growing underground. First he passes along some fissionable material. As the Red repression grows more severe, he finds himself deeper in the developing revolution, discovering at last the one astounding secret weapon which may defeat the aggressors. And with his discovery, Justin moves forward to the revolution's first armed battle against the invaders.

Bald as this outline must of necessity be, it cannot do more than suggest the craftsmanship, the plot complexity, and the skill which has gone into the making of a fine science fiction novel. Get it.

THE IMMORTAL STORM. *By Sam Moskowitz. 269 pp. Atlanta Science Fiction Organization Press. \$5.00*

Here is an item about which the dyed-in-the-Gestetner s-f fan will utter whoops of joy; others, whose interest in the field is limited to reading the stories appearing in magazine or book form, will cock an interested, but not particularly involved, eyebrow.

Mr. Moskowitz writes of fandom's beginnings, its growth during the '30s, and its flowering during the past decade. Unfortunately, he is not a particularly modest man, and my impression, as I read the book, was that fandom is an extension of Moskowitz. For many readers, the history will prove to be as difficult to read as the Kinsey Reports: filled with a collection of minutiae, with name after name known only to a few in the field, with internecine warfare about which, even at this date Mr. Moskowitz waxes highly indignant. "The

Immortal Storm" is an item which does not possess eclectic appeal, but which should, nevertheless, find itself on the bookshelves of those fans who make fandom rather than science fiction their business.

THE TWO TOWERS. *By J. R. R. Tolkien. 352 pp. Houghton Mifflin Co. \$5.00*

A few months ago, I wrote about an unusual and fascinating fantasy, "The Fellowship of the Ring," which recounted the adventures of a small band of mortals and elves as they attempted to foil the schemes of the Master of All Evil. "The Two Towers" is a continuation of that work, and takes us with Frodo, the hobbit (a humanoid being possessed of both human and elfin qualities), on his quest to return the Ring of Power to its destined end in the crater of Mount Doom. Since the all-seeing eye of the Dark Lord follows them, Frodo's companions lose some of their number to the perils, demons, and spells which bar their way, until only Frodo and his faithful hobbit servitor, Sam Gamgee, are left to continue the adventure in the forthcoming third volume, "The Return of the King."

I felt that "The Two Towers" was not up to the high level of its predecessor, but the poetry, the drama, the highly human qualities of its protagonists, the horror of the pitfalls fashioned by the Adversary are all produced by the same adept pen. Mr. Tolkien is a scholar as well as an author. At times his pedantry stands in the way of what should be the story's headlong pace, but his gifts are so plentiful that we must forgive him his enthusiasms and enjoy this, his masterwork, in toto—a work which deserves to stand with E. R. Eddison's classic "The Worm Ouroboros."

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SINCE my editor has informed me that AMAZING goes monthly, starting with the next issue, I think I ought to tell you that from now on, THE REVOLVING FAN will appear in every other issue, alternating with THE SPECTROSCOPE, the department run by my colleague, Mr. Gerson. In my next column, I hope to report on the 13th World Science Fiction Convention which (as you read this) has already been held in Cleveland over the Labor Day week-end. I know that the fanzines for the next year will be filled with bird-and-worm's-eye views of the Clevention, but I hope to give you my reaction to it. So here I am, and there you are, and here's the show—as a certain California comedian would say. Why not? Most of the fanzines reviewed in this issue are from the West Coast. . . .

* * *

SORCERER. Vol. I, #1. Paul Turner, 711 B West Tichener, Compton, Calif. Free. 6 pp.

This is surely the smallest fanzine produced, its size being $3\frac{1}{2} \times 4$ inches. Mr. Turner starts off with an editorial which explains that the 'zine is the unofficial organ of the SRPL—Sorcerers, Rumrunners, and Pariahs, Ltd. Says he, "This, for the uninformed, is a group of fans who be—," and it ends right there, for the other side of the page contains a report of a Los Angeles Science Fiction Society meeting by one who wasn't there. And that's the way the rest of the 'zine goes—confused and confusing. The editor's recommendation is to use the fanzine as kindling. It isn't a bad idea.

CALIFAN. #4. *David Rike, Box 203, Rodeo, Calif. 15¢. 13 pp.*
FANDOM DISPATCH. Vol. I, #1. July, '55. *Same credits. Enclosed with the above. No price listed. 3 pp.*

An editor's lengthy rumination gives his rules of Fanconduct, then segues into a description of how he makes his hectograph pads, with formulae for same. "Quis Custodiet," a so-called short story by Peterry Carrahan, is based on an alleged incident in connection with the SF Con; a department of bogus letters from bogus fans is followed by the real thing. Prone to sophomoric humor, and a poor publication, CALIFAN's weaknesses are shown up by a three page enclosure, FANDOM DISPATCH, which attempts to give news about the personnel, publications, and pranks in the fan field in the same way that FANTASY-TIMES does for the prozines. My recommendation to Rike: Forget CALIFAN and concentrate on DISPATCH.

* * *

PSYCHOTIC. #20. *May-June-July, '55. Richard E. Geis, 1525 N.E. Ainsworth, Portland 11, Oregon. 15¢; 7/\$1. 37 pp.*

I'm a little confused . . . since I thought that Mr. Geis was about to give up PSYCHOTIC, to replace it with a new fanzine called SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. I'm just as happy that he hasn't, for this issue is a good one. First of all, it's larger than usual (8½ x 11" page size). "The Leather Couch," the editor's viewpoints, furnishes us with the same free-and-easy observations we've come to expect from Mr. Geis. The review column, "The Observation Ward," covers the fanzines with ferocious energy; a one-page poem by Wallace West, "Take It Awa-a-a-y!" is rib-ticking, and the best I've read in a fanzine; "The Psycho-Analyst," book review department run by Noah W. McLeod, contains a sprightly, if over-explicit, review of Damon Knight's "Hell's Pavement." Larry Stark's "20,000 Leagues Under The Scalp" is a well-considered comment on the Verne novel, and Gregg Calkins tells why he didn't go to Frisco so persuasively that one feels he ought to be encouraged not to go to more. Oh, yes. There's another report, by Peter Graham, on the SF Convention. He promises this will be the last. The letters section closes this issue of an enjoyably malicious, highly energetic exercise in tearing apart so much of fandom which is filled with inanity.

MUZZY. #7. *Claude R. Hall, 100 E. 20th, Austin, Texas. 20¢; 57 pp.*

The first thing that strikes the reader of this 'zine is the large number of illustrations, most of which deal with the bare facts of feminine beauty. They are surprisingly well done, for which credit should go to Plato Jones, DEA, Juanita Coulson, Nancy Share, Bill Rotsler, and four others. The contents: a report on MUZZY's past and future by the editor, which leads into a series of reflections on sun spots, physiology, the SW Rocket Society, reviews of fanzine, and gossip. Not bad. The item following, "A Rolling Stone," short story by Garth Bentley, is unsatisfactory. Then a column by Nancy Share, and an adolescent day-dream by Hal Annas, in the form of a short story, "The Golden Fleas." G. M. Carr's "Double Or Nothing" is almost the high point of the issue. I say "almost" because the true peaks are the various items tucked away amidst the bare-bosomed beauties—items which range from ribald jokes to indecorous interlineations, all of which I enjoyed. In view of the editor's attitude exposed in this issue, my advice to Mr. Hall is—"Get married."

* * *

FREIBERG'S MAGAZINE. Vol. I, #2. *Summer, '55. Freiberg Pubns., 5369 W. 89th St., Oak Lawn, Ill. 15¢; 8/\$1. 21 pp.*

This second issue is not much better than the first. With a masthead listing eleven persons, it would be reasonable to expect an effort which would approach the standard of professional publications—the avowed aim of the 'zine. But the leadoff article, "This Is Cinerama," reads as if it had been written by the publicity man for Cinerama Productions Corporation, and is devoted to such fulsome and unrealistic praise as to belie its intention of objectivity. "Last Man Dying," the leadoff story, is by Robert R. Warner, and is far more sensitive than the poems of Gertrude M. Carr. However, the story suffers from an archaic plot and style more fitting to 1932 than to 1955. "Hammer and Sickle," the only other fiction in this issue, is the first installment of what is described as a serial: its thud-and-blunder moved me not. Erwin J. Hughmont's "Editor's Notebook" tells why the magazine is "... stimulating and comprehensive, rich with the facts and the culture of this exciting age we live in . . . a history of today and a preview of tomorrow . . ." Come again?

OBLIQUE. #3. June, '55. Clifford I. Gould, 1559 Cable St., San Diego 7, Calif. 15¢; 2/25¢; 5/50¢. 32 pp.

Light-hearted, as so many of the fanzines are, this one nevertheless possesses a core of good sense. Much of the sense derives from the editor, whose "Hello, Out There" starts off the proceedings. Mal Ashworth's "The Pyjamas On the Moorland Road" follows, wherein an English fan describes the pitfalls which lie in wait for the Fan Who Lets a Woman Get Interested. Amusing stuff. Next, an excellent satire entitled "Way Up In The Middle of The . . ." You guessed it—a satire on fandom in the style of Ray Bradbury. Don Wegars' "A Little Round Ball" is only confusing, while in "The Harmonica That Seldom Ever," Jim Harmon recounts some interesting incidents in the life of a s-f writer. Mike Wallace's "Sic Transit Revenue Mundi" tells, with a deftly light touch, of the vicissitudes a Treasury man must encounter in trying to disentangle a fan's money matters. The editor reappears with a column of fanzine reviews, and winds up the issue with the usual letters department. A nice effort.

* * *

SIGMA OCTANTIS. #1. John Mussells and Ralph Butcher, 4839 Shelby Ave., Jacksonville, Fla. Free upon request. 44 pp.

Published with tongue-in-cheek, SIGMA is not a bad example of such 'zines. I find that there are too many of them. Saying, "Don't mind us—we're not taking ourselves seriously," they succeed, with their wry diffidence, in making us refuse to take *them* seriously, and this, I believe, is an error. Fanzines can and do contribute to the field, in giving news, strengthening bonds of common interest, developing future writers for the prozines, destroying senseless conformity, and in inciting new ways of thought.

But to return to the case in point: The leadoff story, a novelette entitled "Blastoff," lives up to its avowed aim, "all story and no plot." This, since it follows an intelligent editorial by Mr. Mussells, is too radical a change of pace, and succeeds only in destroying the effect of the editorial. "The Old Fan and the New" gives the viewpoints of four fans on promags, stories, movies, and books; and Ian T. Macauley's "At Usual Rates" gives another Con report, this time the AgaCon, the first such report I've read in a fanzine. I'm sure it will not be

the last, but it's lucid and well-done. Ralph Butcher, the co-editor, joins the t-in-c devotees with "Blundering Through," and the issue ends with a good department of s-f pocketbook reviews, and a so-so poem, "The Saga of Spaceman's Roost."

* * *

PSI. Vol. I, #2. July, '55. Lyle Amlin, 307 E. Florida, Hemet, Calif. 5¢; 4/15¢. 19 pp.

The editor, a youngster who enjoys his venture, explains apologetically that his next and ensuing issues of PSI will cost 10¢, but will contain 28 pages. A mood piece by Don Stuefloten, "The Martian Sand Bem," continues his series entitled "The Bem Chronicles." It needs more zest—a backbone to be covered skilfully with mood. Both Stuefloten and the editor review the s-f books and promags in "The Trumb" department, and Orma McCormick contributes a poor poem, "Departure of a Visiting Witch." Dego Moore asks "What's Stopping Rockets?" and of course comes up with the answer—the s-f promags, which pay lobbyists to influence Congress, and to stop funds for an integrated rocket program. I think Moore is pulling our collective leg. Norro's poem-lyric, "Rocky Luna," to be sung to the tune of "Davy Crockett," and David Springer's "Byways," which discusses radio telescopes, close the issue. My reaction: Somewhat juvenile, but worth encouraging.

* * *

EISFA. Vol. III, #6. June, '55. 626 Court St., Huntington, Ind. 5¢; 12/50¢. 19 pp.

At five cents, this is one of the best buys in fanzines today. Both editors, Robert and Juanita Coulson, are old hands at this sort of thing, and lead off with sundry interesting news. Fastrisin Arthur (what a pseudonym! starts off the contents with a story, "He'll See You In Your Dreams," an over-long, but interesting and well-written fantasy. Joe L. Hensley does an article on "So You Want To Write STF?" which, while over-simplified, nevertheless contains more common sense than many a pro-piece in the writers' magazines. A short note on the wedding of Thomas Stratton, some amusing interlineations, and a letters department close up the month's issue. Lively, well-done, and up to its usual level.

* * *

That's all for now. See you in the issue after next! . . .

...OR SO YOU SAY



BY THE READERS

Dear Sir:

I have been reading AS science-fiction for 20 years. I am now 27 and I well remember scouring all the secondhand bookstores in my native Dublin from the tender age of seven on and paying exorbitant prices which they charged me. So it is with concern that I have watched the change in your mags from time to time. But this issue that I have before me takes the biscuit. It has no fewer than 30 odd pages of ads and other features which irks me as I pay for the stories, not this other stuff which is slowly taking over your mags. I'm not against a small readers' forum when it is small but not at the story expense. So would you please let's have more stories and less reviews. Hoping that you print my letter and thanking you.

C. F. Darren

312 S. Columbia Ave.

L. A. 17, Calif.

• *You've got a point there: maybe the departments are getting a bit too long. So, with this issue, we're cutting back the size of the readers' section—not too drastically, since it is a popular department.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

Just finished reading your May issue and was very disappointed in it. In "The Observatory" you stated that there were going to be stories with "a strong accent on action." What Happened? That is all I'll say on that subject.

...OR SO YOU SAY

Your cover was excellent. This Valiguisky knows his stuff. Also I always liked the idea of having the cover pictorial jibe with one of the stories. Congratulations on pages 6-7 interior illustrations. The others were a bit lifeless. I'm glad to see a S-F mag with a large letter column, a fine fanzine review and book review.

Now, a request. How about a long, long story? Can you do it?

Now, a question. Wouldn't a man in space have to have his hands encased just the same as his body to protect them? If this is true, why do so many artists depict men in space with bare hands? It's a puzzler to me.

Bruce Knowles
8 Commercial St.
Yormouth, Nova Scotia

● *Whaddayuh mean—"what happened?" There was enough action in the May issue to please anybody. . . . We've been tying in the cover painting with the lead story for a long spell now. . . . About this business of a "long, long story"—we're working on the idea.—ED.*

Dear Sir:

This is my first letter to a S-F mag. I have been intending to write you for some time but haven't gotten around to it.

Well, you beat me to it! I was just going to suggest that you do write-ups of your authors. Just make it a permanent feature of your magazines. (Note the plural.) Although I would rather see photographs than drawings. Personally, I would like to see one of your first ones on Milton Lesser, my favorite. Do you realize you haven't had a story by him for two months?

As for the stories in the July issue (which, incidently, marks the end of my first year in sf), "These Bones for Hire" and "But the Planet Died" tied for first place. They were both "A" stories. I believe you have a great find in Mark Guthrie. Let's have more of him. Ivar Jorgensen's story was all right, but not up to the standards we have come to expect from him. Maybe it was because the plot was too limited. And you might as well have left out "Be My Guest."

In closing, I will say to keep up your present policies. I prefer the action type of story myself and hope enough other people do so that you will truly have "The World's Leading Science Fiction Magazine."

Johnny Marx
Waterbury,
Nebraska

• *Because many of the pictures given to us by the authors do not make for good reproduction, we have them redrawn for the sake of clarity. . . . Guthrie's story was so popular that we've asked him to do more of them. . . . Glad you like our present policy; we may change it at any moment! For the one thing we want to do is make the magazine so unpredictable that readers won't know what to expect from one issue to the next. Maybe we'll make our audience angry, but we'll never bore it to death!—ED.*

Mr. Browne:

Concerning Mr. Kerr's letter in the July issue of *Amazing* and his suggestions about an AS Annual. I think you are missing a bet if you don't try it at least once. The response might be larger than you think. There are, no doubt, a lot of us "dyed-in-the-wool" fans, who seldom, if ever, write letters to the editors (this is my first since 1945), but who would be the first to snap up such a publication. At least the idea is worth consideration.

Your magazine, in its present form, is in pretty good shape. It would be nice if people wrote shorter letters, or not so many of them.

John W. Burgeson
Physics Department
Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida

• *We'd like nothing better than to put out an Amazing Stories Annual. Let us say this much: the idea is being given sincere consideration. It would cost a small-size Fort Knox to put out—and if it laid an egg . . . Brrr! However, we'll see. . . . And we like a man who practices what he preaches: your letter was short and to the point!—ED.*

...OR SO YOU SAY

Dear Sir:

It looks like every one is getting into the act, so I'll do the same. First off, I've been a S-F fan for three and a half years, but I read S-F books long before this, so you might say that it is in my blood.

Right now that blood is getting too thin for comfort. My complaint is that S.F. isn't what it used to be three years ago. It used to be then you could walk into a bookstore and look through three or four mags, and see a story by Heinlein, Sturgeon, Bradbury, Brown, Richard Shaver, S. J. Byrne, Rog Phillips (he wrote some terrific stories for you). But where are they today? Those fellows must be writing with their left hands, and using only half of their gray matter. Your man with *The Spectroscope*, Villiers Gerson feels about the same as I, but what I want to know is **WHAT CAN WE THE READERS DO ABOUT THE DARK AGE OF S-F?** Everyday I meet more people who are new in S-F and are buying the mags, but still for every new fan I have met, there are two who have quit S-F because the material is going from **BAD** to **WORSE**. What can we Do??

First thing to consider is money. I got your July issue today, and was looking over about 6 or 7 others which I have never bought, why, because, they all cost 35¢ and if you're lucky you might find one good story in 2 or 3 of these mags; and how long is it, not over 15,000. (Say that is something I'd like to see again in *AS*, a word count on your stories.) We can read those in one hour or less. What happened to those great stories that ran 25, 30, 40 thousand words, that used to keep me up till all hours of the night?

There is a good idea, by Richard Supoff (mentioned in Frank Kears' letter in your July 5 ish). About the *Amazing Annual* that is. You say it would cost too much, and not enough people would buy. Bah, you're wrong and to prove it I have a plan. First print this letter, with this plan. First all you good S-F fans should write to your good friend and mine, the Ed. of this mag, and make a promise to him stating that you'll buy through a subscription the first 4, 5, or 6 issues of a proposed Annual, at, say, an advance price of 50 cents per copy. Now, editor, you figure out how many of these promises you need to cover expenses, and make a profit. What would you need, 30, 40, or 50 thousand. Well, if you do I'll be the

first to make my promise, and you'll get your 50,000 and more before the last letter comes in. You'll feel this way if you have faith in S-F fans. Then you'll be able to sell more copies by putting these Annuals on the newsstand.

Well, what is the verdict? Will you fans be behind Mr. Browne in this venture?

In closing I have a word for you, Mr. Browne. My idea is most likely full of holes, but if you like this idea, you could probably think up a better way of getting this across.

Keep up the good issues, am looking forward to more stories like "The Rusted Jungle." Good cover this issue.

Eric N. Harlow
215 N. Grove St.
Huntsville, Ala.

• *Let's see now—fifty thousand postcards ordering an Annual. . . . Who needs 50,000? Say 40,000. Who needs 40,000? It's a mad idea—but then so is the idea of space travel. Imagine how red the faces would be around here if we were suddenly inundated with postcards saying simply: "Send me the Annual when and if you bring one out." You imagine it; we can't!—ED.*

Dear Sir:

With regards to your . . . or so you say column of letters in the May issue, I heartily agree with Cloyd Woolley's first letter in that issue.

I have been buying and reading Science Fiction magazines for the past 30 years. In that time I have occasionally glanced at the letters printed. 99% have been puerile drip from juveniles trying to get their name in print! Cut out all this wasted space now devoted to letters and give us our money's worth or what we paid for—Science Fiction.

Frank A. Eldredge
4823 Presido Drive
Los Angeles 43, Cal.

• *Young people buy the magazine too, Mr. E.—and they have the right to be heard. Your term "puerile drip" is not at all accurate to our way of thinking. This department is open to everybody—not just the deep thinkers.—ED.*

Dear Editor:

The September AMZ was okay, though far from an ideal issue. The cover illo was good—kinda like old times. If only the mag had been pulp-size, 244 pages, with a contents page plugging yarns by W. P. McGivern, Don Wilcox, Frank Patton, Nelson Bond, and artwork by Fugua, MacCauley, Rod Ruth, Julian Krupa, ah, well. Time, cruel time.

Best of the stories this time was "One Man To Kill" by Paul Fairman. I can't decide exactly why I liked this, but I did. Maybe because, like the cover, it reminded me of better days (stfly speaking). More in the same vein, please.

Next was "My Name Is Mayhem" by C. H. Thames. This would have been much improved by an additional 20,000 words. But of course, there's more to come. Who knows? This Mayhem may develop into another Cap Future—though better-handled, I hope. But let him keep his lone-wolf status; no ex-pug sidekick of dumb girlfriend gumming up the works.

"The Genius" by Jorgensen scored next. This was obviously filler-material (no offense) but anything about cavemen of prehistoric goings-on catches my interest right quick. Never read a prehistoric yarn yet that I didn't like for some reason or other. Wish this had been stretched to novelette-length.

Lesser's "No Place To Live" was terrible. So much was left unsaid that I got the impression it was written to meet a deadline. Next time tell me more, Milt.

Depts. up to par, all interesting. As to the letter-section, taking them in rotation: Mrs. B. M. Jarvis: If you haven't yet located the "So Shall Ye Reap" ish, write Frank A. Schmid, 42 Sherwood Avenue, Franklin Square, Long Island, New York. Ronn Johnston: Right as rain all the way, and especially par. 2, page 112. Donald A. Bush: My sentiments exactly. And when did you start reading S-F? I started in 1939, with a mag called AMAZING. Herbert E. Beach: You're right; the trend toward snobbish puerile, and almost unreadable S-F started about 1950. A lot of the mags are woefully aware of the mistake now. (Your duology idea is GOOD!) Mrs. Glen Hatfield: Welcome! Hope you stay with us. And let the kid have as much S-F as he wants; school will never teach him as much about the universe—nor about human nature. Mary Mesch: Pulp-size is, too, the best! All you have to do is get a larger handbag. Or better still, carry it in

your hand. Good way to meet other S-F friends. Dan Adkins: Hi, pal. I like Finlay, too. Val Walker: Very well put, but why the doubt anent P. F. Costello? Used to be a guy named Bill McGivern. Probably a house-name now, though. W. Al Turner: What was wrong with the pre-digest style of yarn? What is "pulp-type" fiction? You mean Bradbury, Sturgeon, Vogt? What, in the name of Yngve, is the "modern standard of S-F"? You mean the "standard" that has 90% of the S-F mags in the red? Ray Palmer: Come on back, A. R. Steber! Ralph McMullen: Right! Charles Athey: Ditto. Harvey Schweitzer: HB's pic appeared in an ish of MANHUNT (which ish, HB?) in connection with a Paul Pine yarn. Dean Grennell: Sam Mines was (is?) *not* the best letter-column conductor. Twas Sam Merwin, Jr.; praise Allah. Next is a fellow called, sometimes, Lawrence Chandler. Sam Mines is third. And do you remember Paul L. Payne? James Lewis: HB used the right words in his reply to your letter. My thoughts, too.

That does it for this time, Mr. Browne. Thanks for listening and when may we expect the next Paul Pine novel?

Charles L. Morris
Route 6, Box 34
Gaffney, South Carolina

• *One thing about C. Morris: he gets his money's worth out of an issue! . . . As you have discovered, from reading the Observatory this issue, Amazing Stories goes monthly with the January, 1956, issue—so instead of duologies, we're going to run serials. . . . We wrote only one story under the name of L. Chandler: a thing called "Forgotten Worlds"—and which the fans have already forgotten! That picture in MANHUNT was a drawing and resembled your editor not at all! The next Paul Pine novel will be out in January (if we finish it in time!), published by Simon & Schuster and titled "The Taste of Ashes." (Well, you did ask!)*—ED.

Mr. Browne:

I have just finished reading your July issue. I enjoyed it very much. In reading some of the letters from the readers, I can see that most of them agree with me that it is tops in the biggest way.

My main reason for writing this letter can best be described

as "jammed," a word often used in my work. I am a radar operator, and unless you know the principles of radar, it is a very difficult subject. What I'm trying to say is this. Although your magazine is very clearly worded, it contains a very definite lack of illustrations. I find that if I have a picture of the person, (or persons) objects, etc. being discussed in the story, my ability to understand the idea of the story is greatly improved, thus insuring more enjoyment. I feel that if you would place an illustration of the idea, characters, objects or climax of the story in your magazine it would be a great improvement.

It is not my habit to write this type of letter but as I plan to continue reading the magazine, it would improve my enjoyment. You might put this suggestion before your other readers.

Thanks a lot for a great magazine.

A/3c David B. Nail
No. 16470062
727th A.C./W Sqdn. Box #118
Myrtle Beach Air Force Base
South Carolina

• *The trouble with a lot of illustrations is that it cuts into the reading matter. With only 130 pages, one illustration to a story seems a reasonable allotment. But, as you say, let's see what the others say.*—ED.

Dear Browne:

I'm glad you began the "Mayhem" romances. Entertaining, not overloaded with scientific suppositions, but still within the realm of credibility. A real treat for juvenile minds such as mine! All of us can't be collegians nor often very academic. Ha!

Bobbie Lee
1153 Summit St.
Columbus, Ohio

• *That's tellin' 'em, Bobbie, old boy! (Or is it girl?)*—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

As far as I am concerned your name is mud! For a while after you went digest you showed a trend toward more mature

fiction. Now, however, it looks as though you're back to the old, sub-teenage sludge.

Several readers say in OSYS that they prefer less emphasis on science and more on the fictional part of the story. They claim that they prefer reading about *people*, they want *action*. You seem to be in accord with these people. There is one question that I would like to address to both you and they. Why the hell do you read SF and claim to be fans of science fiction when actually all you are is a bunch of phonies! You are adults who are ashamed to admit that comic books are still your favorite reading matter. What you want is a comic book with a dignified looking cover and you've got it in *Amazing*.

May God have mercy on your souls!

Richard Santelli
3525 S. 53rd Ave.
Cicero 50, Ill.

• *Anyone who'd like to answer the gentleman for us? We tried to four different times but had to give it up. For obvious reasons. And we're still trying to figure out the reasoning behind that last line of his.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

How deep does author Fairman ("One Man to Kill," Sept.) think the East River is?!! With a space ship two miles long and a half mile in diameter at the bottom of the fabulous East River, he leaves our hero and heroine waiting for Navy divers to rescue them! Seems more like a rescue for the good old Army helicopter boys.

And with the same dimensions in mind, the lad on the cover painting must be atop a building some 11,000 feet high. But as far as the cover goes, that is artistic license. It is a fine job.

John Spoolman
Str. Frontenac
Marine P.O.
Detroit, Mich.

• *Hey, Paul—the man asked you a question. Wait a minute! Come on back here and answer him. Look, the guy's a customer—you can't just say the blank with it and go fishing. Go ahead, explain yourself.—ED.*

... OR SO YOU SAY

heroes, but *victims*. The mighty men of valor who once strode the universe are gone, replaced by small, often unadmirable men who are barely more than the guy next door in a space suit. The John Carters have been supplanted by the Sam Joneses, the dignity and sterling character of Tarzan of the Apes discarded for the hobbledehoy antics of the town drunk.

You don't have your audience waiting at the newsstands to read about this present-day type of protagonist. No one wants to emulate Sam Jones, the astrophysicist of the good ship *Falling Star*. Sam's wife is a shrew, he suffers from dandruff, shingles, three neuroses and an Oedipus complex, and what he wants most from life is bourbon and benzedrine. Is this the kind of "hero" you want to spend an evening relaxing with? Hell, no! Too many of us are like him to want to read about him.

Also, the strong love interest between a tremendous man and a fine woman, so often found in the memorable stories of twenty years ago, has been replaced by a wise-cracking, double-entendre kind of relationship you run into down at the corner pub these days. The female spends half her time waving her glands at Sam, while he alternates between leering like a satyr and panting like a purple poodle. Entertainment—phooey!

Nowadays it's all peppy dialogue and slick action and the searching of twisted souls. The warmth of honor and ideals in the classic sense is missing, the wealth of descriptive detail abandoned in the name of "pace," the unfettered imagination that builds unique adventure and stirring deeds discarded for the bon mot and the sly seduction of a nymphomaniac. No wonder Jules Verne and H. G. Wells are still read to this day—read with all the avidity given when the ink was still fresh on the first editions of their works.

Today's science fiction has substituted a gooey quicksand for the firm foundations of yesterday. We're going back to concrete.—HB

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